



RIVERSDALE COURT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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RIVERSDALE COURT.



CHAPTER I.

THE FETE.

THURSDAY, the morning of the fête, presented itself in the brightest attire and temper. Soft smiling sunshine, blue sky, flecked here and there with light fleecy clouds, foliage and flowers sparkling with dewdrops, while over the distant hills and dales rested a picturesque veil of thin grey mist. And the voice of the morning was as cheering as it looked; the birds chirped and sang, the children laughed, and everybody talked hopefully and joyously. How happy I felt as I sped about the beautiful gardens before breakfast, listening and gazing, and gathering this sweet flower and that, and

drinking in at every sense the charming sounds and scents filling earth, air, and sky!

“Oh, the day is perfect, dear mammy!” cried I, dancing into the breakfast-room with some half-open roses in my hand, and laying them on the table before grandmamma, the while I warmly pressed my customary kiss on her faded but still soft cheek. “It is impossible to express how heart-cheering it all looks and feels! Just the weather—just everything we could possibly desire!”

My grandmother smiled lovingly upon me.

“My little girl is an impersonation of this morning; I need no other description,” she replied, taking up the flowers.

“And it is so comforting to think how few hearts there are in Riversdale to-day which will not respond to ours,” I continued, seating myself at the table; “and those which cannot are only hindered by sickness or the infirmities of age, not through mental distress.”

Early in the forenoon the whole village, indeed all the cottage neighbourhood, presented as lively and bright a scene of life and colour as can be imagined. A good-sized field opening into it was devoted that day to the service

of men and boys for cricket, football, and other games; while for those who preferred sedentary amusements and rest, or for the aged, several seats were arranged in shady spots, with small tables near, on which lay a plentiful supply of newspapers, magazines, &c., wherewith to entertain themselves, while smoking a pipe of tobacco, also provided by dear, thoughtful grandmamma. To further render their enjoyment of the day as complete as she could, that solicitude was obviated which might have proved in some measure, especially to the poorest, a cloud dimming the brightness of their pleasures—the loss of their day's wages. Every labouring man, woman, and boy, therefore, had made up to them the deficiency in their weekly gains which their presence at the fête would necessarily occasion. Thus pecuniary anxieties were effectually laid to rest. This might, of course, have been easily remedied by electing Saturday as the day of entertainment, but for several reasons the rector and grandmamma objected to such a choice.

By three o'clock the orchard and field were all astir and a-flutter with neatly dressed,

smiling-faced cottagers, among whom the benevolent entertainer, leaning on the rector's arm, moved about welcoming each arrival by the sunshine of her looks and her kind and motherly words and manner.

I and my young friends, full of pleasure and importance, scampered hither and thither, encouraging the girls, little and big, to play, conducting mothers with babies to cool and comfortable seats, scattered over the orchard in all directions, under shade of the fruit trees, for such especial accommodation, some of them being covered with thick, soft cushions, whereon the hot and tired parents could lay their infants to rest safely.

"Oh, Mary Dawkins, I am glad to see you; I was just thinking about you, and hoping that no unforeseen circumstance had prevented your coming," exclaimed I, as after a while, separated from my companions, I was passing a rather secluded seat, on which sat a pretty, pleasant-faced young woman, resting and cooling herself, for she had walked some distance in from the country. "Is not this charming weather for our merrymaking?"

"'Deed, miss, 'tis," assented Mary, rising

to drop her courtesy; "good for anything and everything, as my Bill says this very morning."

"Sit down, Mary," for she still remained respectfully standing. "I want to have a little chat with you. As William is so satisfied with the weather, I conclude his garden is at last prospering to his heart's content?" looking questioningly at Mrs. Dawkins. Pretty Molly was not ready with an answer, however, and I continued, smiling, "He has now such a productive piece of ground, I conclude you have plenty of everything this year — peas, beans, potatoes, &c.; have you not?"

Mary looked exceedingly discomfited at this inquiry.

"'Deed, then, miss, we ought maybe to have 'em; yes, I s'pose we ought, but we haven't, and that's the long and short of it."

"Have you not?" exclaimed I, with an irrepressible ring of angry amazement in my voice; "and such a productive summer as this is for every species of vegetation! Oh, Mary, I am afraid the fact is William does not like gardening, and will not make the necessary

exertion in its cultivation, without which nothing can succeed. What a pity!" added I, in a more softened tone, poor Mrs. Dawkins's reddening cheeks and distressed expression at once subduing my impatient temper, and exciting feelings of regret that I, of all people, should have been the one to shadow her day's brightness. "It was not surprising his other garden failed," I continued, gently, "for everything was against him—soil, aspect, and its sloping position. But your present piece of ground is, our gardener Graham said, *perfect*; and, you know, he is very clever."

"Yes, miss, I have always heered say he is," she replied, with good-tempered indifference, wiping her heated face.

"Well, but then, how is it, dear Mary? Where *does* the fault lie, do you think?"

"'Deed, miss, I don't know"; adding more quickly, "I don't mean to say as how we have *nothing* exactly, for there be taties, and plenty on 'em, and beans—yes, and there be peas for sure, and we have got some lovely cabbage, we have."

"You have!" exclaimed I. "Oh, that is

doing excellently! Why, you said you had *no* vegetables, and, after all, your garden is as full as any one's. What is it you really mean, Mary?"

"Well, miss, this is the way 'tis: we have 'em, but they be all too small to eat; so that be as bad as though we hadn't 'em, you see, miss."

"Too small? They are too young, you mean?"

"Yes, miss, for sure that must be it," replied Molly, in a tone of cheerful acquiescence, evidently quite relieved at having the mystery so satisfactorily cleared up.

"Your husband planted the seeds too late, then. What a pity! for I believe that will prevent their ever coming to perfection," said I, with difficulty restraining a passionate outburst of abuse of the stupid, lazy William.

"Yes, for sure, I have heered they don't do so well if planted too late," she answered, with aggravating equanimity.

"What a pity!" repeated I, impatiently (it was no use trying to be calm, I could not help myself); "such wasteful loss of labour, land, and the best and finest vegetable seed Graham

possessed!—part of the same store, in fact, which supplied our garden, and has given us, and still gives us, an *over*-abundance of everything we want!”

“We have beautiful cabbages, we have,” persisted poor Molly, in a self-comforting tone, and glad to have one safe point to fall back upon. “Bill is a right clever hand at a-raising of cabbages, he is; and the peas and t’other things are a-coming on now, anyhow, Bill says.”

“Yes, so I should think they were,” replied I, with indignant reference to the *anyhow*.

“Well, you see, miss, we should have had as plenty and as early as other folks,” resumed Mary, beginning to collect her slow-moving senses together, “if it hadn’t been for them birds, which a-kept picking off their heads as fast as they showed themselves above ground; and then, my! didn’t the slugs and snails and mice a-feast upon ’em frightful! And what mortal power can stand agin all that, you know, Miss Ennis? Why,” she continued, in a sort of soliloquy, “it seems a’most like fighting against God to try—it do.”

Her look, voice, and manner were provok-

ingly full of an indolent kind of resignation, the offspring of mere laziness, not faith.

The slugs and snails and mice (Mary evidently considered the last a species of the two first) utterly nonplussed me as they had done the Dawkinses. It did seem, indeed, like contending against an invincible army, and for a few seconds I looked into her pretty but provokingly contented face, too puzzled to speak.

"Your husband might surely inform himself by reading and inquiry," I said, presently. "How do other people manage? How does Graham keep them down? He is as good-natured as he is clever, and would willingly give William any information he requires. Why has he not consulted him? All the other villagers are thankful, as you know, to have such a first-rate referee to whom to apply in every case of gardening difficulty."

"Oh, yes, miss; I know of old, Mr. Graham is very kind, he is," answered Mary, increasing my irritation by her good-humoured complacency. Her perfect freedom from all jealousy, too, though amiable in its character, was, under the circumstances, additionally aggravating to my impatient temper.

“ Well, if you think him so clever and kind, Mary, why do not you persuade your husband, over whom I know you possess a good deal of influence, to consult him a little? *Now*, for instance, on this perplexing subject of the insect tribe, who seem to have particularly selected your garden this summer in preference to any other wherein to carry on their depredations, why not at once talk to Graham about it, and beg his advice in what way to remedy the evil ? ”

“ Thank you, Miss Ennis—to be sure—yes—it would be a good plan, as you say, miss,” replied Molly, with obviously forced interest; “ Bill shall go to Mr. Graham to-morrow, he shall.”

Mary Roper, now Mrs. Dawkins, for some time filled the place of upper housemaid in Riversdale Court. Every one liked her, and every one regretted when her bright, pretty face disappeared from amongst us to become the property of William Dawkins, our head dairyman. If the truth be confessed, the well-doing of the Court establishment suffered no loss by the move, her qualifications as an active servant being of a very insufficient kind. In this

respect, to wit, industry and activity, the husband, unfortunately for their domestic interests, singularly resembled his wife; both were (*stupidly*, I thought) good-tempered, and both were lazy, easy-going, self-indulgent people. They had now two pretty little children, girls of four and six years old, who were continually ill from the effects of over-eating and over-sleeping, the promoting both which gratifications was the mother's ceaseless endeavour, convinced, as she said, it was the one most certain means of securing their health and growth. Useless were all arguments to persuade her their paleness, habitual delicacy, and frequent sharp fits of illness were entirely the result of injudicious management.

"My dear Miss Ennis, they be natural delicate, they be, poor little things; and if I don't strengthen 'em now, when be I to do it?"

"But, Mary," I urged, "if they were weak on their legs from disease or otherwise, would you try and strengthen their joints by making them walk until they dropped down, or nearly did so, through sheer exhaustion?"

"La no, miss! how can you think I would?" she replied, with dilated eyes.

“And yet, notwithstanding your conviction that their digestion and general health are extremely delicate, you force the first to do as much hard work as you would a perfectly strong, *able-bodied* digestion! Can you not see that, Mary? and can you not understand the truth of what grandmamma told you—that you must treat a weak digestion as moderately and gently as you would a weak limb? Give it no more to do than its powers are quite capable of, and carefully avoid overtaxing strength that, in the common course of nature, is certain to fail utterly if you do—fail ultimately, if not at once.”

“Yes, for sure; I see, miss,” answered Molly, looking half puzzled and totally unconvinced, as usual.

I was yet talking on the subject of Bill’s garden difficulties, when my words were suddenly arrested by the pressure of a large white hand laid on my shoulder, and a low, melancholy voice saying behind me,—

“Well, Enny, how do you and the world get on together?”

My face flushed at this unwonted act of familiarity on the part of the usually reserved speaker.

“Oh, Charley! you are just arrived at the right moment, for you know everything.”

“Stop, stop!” he interrupted, with a short, dreary laugh; “not so fast, child. Know everything? Not quite; but would to Heaven I did not know the half I do! Well, what is your trouble, Enny?”

“I am sure you can help us on this point, at least,” said I; adding quickly, as I laid a restraining hand on hers, “no, don’t move, Mary; there is plenty of room for Mr. Beechley; and to-day, you know, these seats are expressly intended for village use. Charles, you can sit nicely here,” placing myself in the centre; but he refused, preferring to retain his then position, leaning over the back of the seat close beside me.

“Well, Enny, what is it?” he repeated, sighing wearily.

“You are tired, Charley; I hear it in the sound of your voice,” I said, looking up kindly into his sad, pale face, knowing how utterly distasteful to his ascetic nature was the day’s tumult and its required occupation. .

“You have been doing so much yesterday and to-day, besides parish duties for your

father," I continued, with increasing sympathy ;
"do sit down and rest awhile."

At that instant a tall young man, with a slouching gait and superabundant development of the Lubin style of comeliness, advanced from one side to speak to Mary.

"How lucky !" cried I ; "you are just the person I want, William. Now then, Charley, you shall hear the difficulty over which Mary and I have been perplexing our wise heads."

The ruddy colour in Dawkins's good-humoured face rose to a scarlet hue on hearing this address, and his slow-witted round blue eyes stared in questioning bewilderment at Charles and me.

Mary's husband was not a favourite of Charley's ; I knew, indeed, he particularly disliked him. Now, as poor William was remarkable for an obliging, pleasant-tempered disposition, and had never, by word or deed, intentionally offended his rector's son, or dreamed of doing such a thing, this antipathy on the part of the latter surprised me much. Dislike seemed the more inexcusable also because evidently the result of a foolish prejudice to his

personal appearance, and one day I gaily taxed him with this unjust feeling.

“Some original cause must have inspired it, Charley—I am quite sure it did,” said I; “do tell me what it was.”

A deep flush spread over his face, and by the angry look in his eyes he seemed half disposed to resent my question.

This expression softened wondrously, however, when, after two or three suspicious glances, he saw, I suppose, that no second meaning lay beneath my words; but his voice was low and constrained as he replied,—

“I hate that style of feature! there’s no humility, reticence, or modesty in those broad snub noses and large mouths; and such brutes as they are for staring—mere animals! Ah,” he added, in a tone of intense disgust, “I loathe the whole tribe!”

But to return. I briefly described to Charles the Dawkinses’ agricultural difficulties,—“And,” continued I, “the most aggravating part of the matter is that none of the other gardens seem to have been attacked in like manner. Of course, William, you did all you could to suppress the evil?”

“Oh, yes, miss; I did, surely,” scratching his head lazily; “I did everything as could be done—I couldn’t do no more.”

“No,” rejoined I, smiling, “you most probably could not. Now, Charley, what have you to say to that?”

“I am quite in Mr. Dawkins’s used-up condition,” he replied, raising his cynical eyebrows and shrugging his shoulders; “I have nothing to say.”

The tone and manner of these words chafed and stirred up the usually imperturbable dairyman, and thereupon he commenced an offended vindication of himself and his proceedings.

Presently I looked up at Charles, amused by William’s original mode of speech. I was smiling, but the smile died at once on my lips. Charles stood, with stooping head, and both hands grasping the back of the seat, gazing at Dawkins with knitted brow, and so fierce and vindictive, and yet singularly abstracted an expression of face that, at first, astonishment prevented my speaking, and I could only stare at him. A dread suddenly possessed me. Was he, unknown to his friends, subject to fits of any kind? Gently I laid my

hand on his arm, saying, "Are you ill, dear Charles?"

My voice and touch instantly broke the spell, or whatever it was, and, starting, he withdrew his eyes from the dairyman's discomfited countenance, raised his head, and looked about with the questioning uncertainty of one who, in a half-sleeping state, has caught the sound, but not the sense, of words addressed to him.

His first question seemed to confirm my fearful suspicion.

"What did you say, Enny?" He spoke dreamily, passing his hand over his forehead as though to clear away the mental mist still clouding his brain. "I was not attending to you at the moment," he added, more collectedly; "what was it, child?"

Just then the Dawkinses' two clever children, whose gambols in the distance their mother had been anxiously watching, ran up to the father, and, catching hold of his large red hands, pulled him away, nothing loth, to see some wonder they had found in the orchard. I, too, was now pounced upon and carried off by a bevy of girl and boy friends, who discovered my retreat, and insisted on my coming

with them to witness a pretty rustic game, performed by some of the elder village girls.

Poor Charley! I quite forgot his very existence as I ran away; and it was only upon turning to speak to one of my companions, perceiving him still standing by the bench, and gazing wistfully after me, that I remembered how rudely I had acted. "But if he wishes to come with us why does he not?" I thought, impatiently; "why need he be so disagreeably ceremonious? Captain Bell and other gentlemen are not so." Charles did not join our merry party, however, and with a secret feeling of regret, and of discontent with myself, I saw him soon quit the orchard.

Game succeeded game, and by the time tea was prepared, with its abundant supply of buns, cakes, and bread-and-butter, every individual, old and young, was more than ready to partake of it.

I and my host of assistants and supporters enjoyed arranging the seats and contributing to the requirements of the hungry, and flew about, here, there, and everywhere, in gay performance of our duty. As for Monica, she

was so light and erratic in her graceful movements it would hardly have caused me any astonishment had she sprung on the table and danced a Caledonian 'twixt the cakes and cups, after the fashion of those same barbaric exploits between crossed sword-blades. But Harry, her brother, was invaluable—always by my side, vigorously aiding in the promotion of the general comfort, his merry spirit, like his pretty little sister's, shedding additional sunshine around, and creating a constant cheerful laughter by the boyish *empressement* with which he rushed about, procuring a cup of tea for one, cake or bread-and-butter for another, interspersing these benevolent attentions by frequent liftings up of baby creatures unable to reach seats for themselves, and who, forgotten amidst the general confusion, and the having still younger children to attend to, kept constantly dropping in long after the others.

Once, happening to look across the orchard, I saw poor Charles Beechley leaning against an apple-tree watching us. His pale face wore as lugubrious an expression as though he was presiding at the funeral rites of a dear departed friend.

Hastily completing something I was doing, I turned with intent to run and beg him to come and join our party; but he was gone, nor, upon searching, could I anywhere find him.

CHAPTER II.

VILLAGE FETE CONCLUDED.

AND now all was over. The day was closing fast, and the band of happy revellers, having listened respectfully to a short address from their beloved rector, and relieved their grateful feelings by deafening shouts in honour of the good madam, her grand-daughter, and the great gentry who had done them the kindness to help make everything so pleasant, began rapidly to disperse and return to their homes.

“Ennis,” said a well-known melancholy voice by my side, “now this herd of rustic humanity no longer requires your supervision, I wish you would come and take half an hour’s quiet stroll with me through the grounds—will you?”

My heart was just then overflowing with the warmest sympathy towards this *herd of rustic humanity* as, standing rather apart and alone at that moment, I watched their departure, and these cynical, half-contemptuous words of their rector's son came down like a cold wet blanket on my pleasantly excited feelings; it was as if the genial south breeze then moving the leaves had suddenly veered round to that point condemned by the poor as "blowing no good to man or beast."

Few proposals could have been more utterly distasteful to me on the present occasion, or less in unison with my inclinations, than was this sombre request of Master Charley's. Prepared by past experiences, I guessed that the motive prompting it was to amiably favour me with a sharp lecture concerning some one of many short-comings during the day, of the objectionableness of which I was wholly unconscious.

But, even were that not in store for me, my spirit was in no mood to relish a solitary ramble with so dull a companion as Charles, who had on several occasions declared himself an enemy to the laughter and gaiety of

which my heart was just then childishly brimful.

“But, Charley, we shall be going in to tea directly, you know,” I ventured to say, flattering myself I was very skilfully concealing the reluctance I felt to comply with his wish. Perhaps I did; perhaps I succeeded too well. “What will all my friends think of my walking off and leaving them to take care of themselves?” I added, gaily.

“We shall not be long absent,” he replied, gravely; “not longer than you like,—it will depend entirely upon yourself.”

“If it does, I can answer for the walk being indeed a short one,” I mentally ejaculated; so without further opposition, which I well knew would, if prolonged, merely terminate in one of two results—either we should quarrel, or I should be ignominiously reduced to submission, and, perhaps, in consequence of my very unwillingness, obliged, by way of propitiation, to grant a much longer walk than I might otherwise have done,—so, as I said, without further opposition, I followed Charles through a little side gate conducting to the pleasure-grounds, and we proceeded on our ramble.

For some distance we pursued a winding path through the shrubbery, walking fast and in silence, for the confused sound of voices, and the laughter and crying of children, yet reached our ear, and Charles seemed desirous of escaping from all ere entering on any conversation. After awhile we arrived at a spot where silence reigned undisturbed, except by the song and twitter of birds, and the rush of water as the stream danced, bounded, and murmured over its pebbly bed to join the sparkling lake.

At this point Charles, who was rather in advance, lingered, offering me his arm, which, as was sometimes my wont, I accepted.

“Oh, yes!” I said, clasping it readily within my own, “I am glad of support, for I feel very tired.” (This as a quiet hint that much more exertion would be neither desirable nor agreeable.) I looked up and smiled while speaking, and was proceeding to chatter volubly, in hopes to even ward off altogether, or at least to soften, the severity of the impending reproof, but the expression of his face checked me into complete silence.

During all our bygone acquaintance I had

never seen the look in his features they now wore.

“Tired?” he repeated, in a low voice, “I should think you were; the wonder would be if you were not! However, we are coming to a seat directly, and will rest. I want—to—to speak to you.”

“Oh me! what can it be about?” thought I; “what iniquity have I been guilty of? Perhaps I *was* a little too free and easy with Harry Dormer; but, after all, what does that signify?—he is only a boy, and I have known him for years! But no, that cannot be it!” Meanwhile we advanced in silence as before, Charles walked very fast, pulling me on with him. He was evidently much excited, and presently, arrived at the bench, we sat down.

With increasing reluctance to receive the threatened lecture, I again thrust divers matters of conversation between myself and it; talking without much reflection, and on any subject that came first to hand—excepting the objectionable Dormer case and a few others I feared might present favourable openings for the scolding I dreaded.

But soon it was apparent Charles paid no

heed whatever to a single word I said. The same indefinable look was in his face—a look evidently connected with thoughts of far graver import than was likely to be excited by any of my girlish misdemeanours. He did not move or speak as I chatted on, but with hands resting on his knees, depressed head, and knitted brow, gazed before him into vacancy, as indifferent to my remarks as though I were not speaking. Was I in his thoughts at all? I began speedily to comfort myself with the hope, nay, almost the conviction, I was not.

“Ennis,” he said, presently, with a sudden abruptness that startled me. There was silence for a few seconds.

“Yes, Charley?” replied I, questioningly.

“There is something I wish to say to you,” he resumed, “the which, if not said quickly, I fear I shall be unable to say at all.”

The extreme seriousness of his tone and manner almost frightened me.

Again I looked inquiringly, “What is it, Charley?”

His breathing was now so laboured he could with difficulty articulate. “I will come to the point at once,” he went on, quickly. “If

matters are as I wish, little need be said on either side; if the reverse is the case, no amount of eloquence, of entreaty, of argument, will avail anything: of that I am perfectly convinced. Perhaps I should have done more wisely to wait longer—wait until maturer age and experience had taught you to perceive and understand the evil, and appreciate the worth, in characters—until—until; but I cannot wait! I cannot bear this uncertainty! I must and will know the truth, one way or other. Ennis, Ennis, I love you!—Yes, I love you!”

He stopped an instant, breathing hard—almost gasping.

I was bewildered—dazed—and had no consciousness at the moment of either my thoughts or feelings.

“These words,” he continued, “may sound light and commonplace to one who from babyhood has known herself to be an object of undivided affection to all around her. Light and commonplace!” he repeated, with a vehemence that made my heart bound; “good heavens! why at this instant the spirit dictating those three words, *I love you*, is burning in my heart—is rushing in a lava tide through

every vein in my body! Oh, girl! I love you as no other man on earth ever will, or can love you again,—better than the whole wide world besides,—better, far, far better than life itself! You have the power—*you* only, on all this earth, hold the power in your weak hands to turn me right or left, to make of me anything—everything—you choose! I have at times seemed harsh in manner to you. Ah, child, child! little do you know how omnipotent is your influence over me! Tell me—if you do not actually love me now you are still so young—so little more than a mere child—but in time—in time, Ennis—say that in time you will love me—you will try to do so. Speak, girl—speak quickly: I cannot bear this longer.”

His dark pale skin had become a leaden hue, and his eyes glowed with so frightful an intensity, it was as if the volcanic spirit he spoke of glared from out them.

Words cannot describe the painful sensation of distress and amazement that filled my every sense upon hearing this wild, undreamed-of declaration. I had always been conscious he admired me in a sort of way, and after his

cynical fashion even entertained a species of brotherly regard for me; but that he loved me, or could love *any* girl, with the wild, unreasonable, and unreasoning violence—the truth of which the bare assertion only of such a man as Charles Beechley rendered unquestionable—was a fact which had never entered my most vivid imagination to conceive possible. No; every syllable he uttered was on fire with an unmistakable truthfulness that at once made its unopposed entrance into heart and brain—and—what could I say? I did not love *him*. I feared—nay, I was not sure I did not even dislike—him. And yet—oh, how at that moment I felt for and pitied him!

These conflicting feelings so utterly overpowered me I could not speak. I recollect that for some seconds I stupidly stared at him with a frightened, silent astonishment, as if he had just told me some extraordinary story wholly unconnected with myself; then, burying my face in my hands, I burst into a passion of tears.

Charles sat immovable, save for the audible heaving of his chest. He knew not what construction to put upon my conduct, and seemed

either unable or unwilling to press further for an answer. But his unpleasant basilisk eyes were fixed upon me; that I knew, without seeing them, and the feeling enabled me the sooner to subdue my emotion.

“Oh, Charles!” I sobbed, “I am so sorry—so very, very sorry you said all that! Oh! why did you? why did you? You *must* have seen—have always seen—I do not love you in that way! As a sister I do—and will—but—but—I *never* can—”

He sprang up, uttering an exclamation that sounded like a groan, and commenced to walk backwards and forwards before me—rapidly—wildly—as would a savage animal in a den.

I had not courage to say more, and knew not what to do, but sat, feeling very unhappy, wiping my eyes, and sobbing, longing to run away home and be out of it all. The temptation to put this wish into practice became so strong I finally resolved to take advantage of the next opportunity when his back was turned to do so without further hesitation. At that instant he stopped and faced me.

Never shall I forget his look — ghastly,

fierce, glaring, more like an enraged tiger than a man. Every feature was distorted by a hurricane of suppressed passion. For a brief space this tempest held possession of him, soul and body; he was immovable as a statue, gazing on my down-bent, averted face, for a brief space. When nervously I glanced again, it had passed away.

“Well,” he said, drearily, throwing himself beside me on the seat, “*that* bright dream is over, and now—Heaven help me!” He sat silent for a minute, his elbow resting on the arm of the bench, and his forehead on his hand, the latter partly covering his face. “I thought you seemed to like me of late,” he resumed, in the same dreary tone, “and your previous indifference I imputed but to the shyness, the natural reticence, of the modest young creature you are.”

There was such a depth of sadness in his voice, mingled with a tone of hopelessness and despair, akin even to desperation, that the tears gushed afresh from my eyes.

“Fool that I was, to be so deluded!” he exclaimed, abruptly, with fierce bitterness, through his closed teeth. “Fool to have let

my hopes, my feelings, thus run wild ! Fool ! fool ! fool ! ” and bounding from the seat he strode rapidly down a side walk, and was soon lost to my sight.

Sincerely grieved though I felt at his distress—confused, pained by the whole scene—his departure afforded me inexpressible relief, and, sitting up, I began to collect my scattered senses.

“ Poor Charley ! ” I murmured, “ what possessed him, I wonder, to fall so literally head foremost in love with me, of all people in the world !—I, who have scarcely ever been commonly civil to him ! And to have imagined I loved him ! Good gracious ! what did I ever say or do to give rise to such a wild idea ? Why, my conscience and I have been at continual war with each other on account of the rude speeches (exceedingly *unkind*, that same conscience called them) I so often made when he angered me, and also for my ungrateful avoidance of his society.

“ Oh, Charley ! a thousand times would I rather that you had gone on scolding and lecturing me than have taken this absurd notion into your clever, wilful head ! ”

Rising, I slowly returned to the house, bethinking me the while what a capricious, inconsistent thing the human heart was! Although frequently offended, hurt, and mortified by his reproofs, and humbled by his criticisms, I never disliked Charles; perhaps, indeed, I even liked him the better; but certain it was that now, directly he declared his love, I began to hate him,—yes, despite my heart being painfully full of pity as well.

“How odd!” I said to myself; uttering a dismal little laugh at the thought, as I added, “do I always mean to feel and act in that way towards every man who, pays me the compliment of loving me?”

Fortunately the duty of tea-making, which this evening devolved upon me, afforded a fair pretext for concealing my flushed face and rather red eyes; but I was a good deal confused by the numerous inquiries of where I had been hiding all this time, which immediately assailed me on my entrance.

“I saw you and Mr. Beechley going out together by the little orchard-gate,” said Dora Bell, coming close to me, and speaking in a low

voice, whose tones, unconsciously to herself, had in them a very mournful ring.

Poor girl! every spark of further enjoyment was extinguished for that day in her heart.

“Yes,” replied I, with, I flattered myself, skilfully assumed indifference, “Charles was thoroughly sick of all the noise, confusion, and business of the day. He even left me (not very polite, was it?)—left me sitting alone on the bench under the acacia-tree, and went home.”

I knew that Sariann was keenly observant of my looks and words.

“Oh, he is gone home, then?” answered the former, in a much relieved but sorrowful voice.

I was saved answering by Harry Dormer hurrying to my side with boyish eagerness to assist, he declared, in the tea-making; and I felt truly glad of the interruption. But, presently, Sariann seized an opportunity to ask me gently,—

“Did my brother say that business required his presence at home, Enny?”

“No,” said I; blushing as I whispered, “come and see me to-morrow, dear Sariann, and—and—I will tell you all.”

“I will,” she murmured, sadly ; and, hastily drinking a cup of tea, bade me good-bye, and quitted the room.

When quiet had again returned slowly to our dear old house—when the last guest had departed, and grandmamma and I were alone, I gave her a brief account of the distressing scene between Charles and myself in the shrubbery.

I was warm in my expressions of the amazement I had felt, and which still possessed me, on discovery of his love, and great was my surprise that the recital excited no corresponding feelings in grandmamma ; on the contrary, her smile and voice, half amused, half sorrowful, plainly showed me that, however fast asleep I might have been over the fact, she had been wide awake from first to last.

“You are too young to understand your own mind on such subjects, darling,” she said, presently ; “and Charles acted with an injudiciousness, an almost boyish precipitancy, I should not have believed him capable of, in speaking so early to you on the point.”

“But, mammy !” I interposed, impetuously,

and with indignantly flushing cheeks, "I do not like Charles in that way! I never have, and never can. He is not a man to love; he is so capricious and incomprehensible. Talk of the weather! he is twenty degrees more uncertain. With observation, people generally learn to know when it will be fine, and when wet and stormy; but who can ever know what to expect with Charles? One moment he is all sunshine; the next a terrific thunder-storm."

I was sitting on a stool at grandmamma's feet, my two arms resting on her knees. Fondly and tenderly she placed her dear soft hand on my head. I knew it was with intent to calm my childish irritation; and it did so. Taking the beloved hand into mine, I kissed and laid my cheek upon it.

CHAPTER III.

A SCENE BY MOONLIGHT.

NOTWITHSTANDING the fatiguing exertions of the day, I had never felt less sleepy than when that night I went to my room.

After donning my dress, and putting on a loose robe—my hair unfastened, &c., and enclosed for the night, as usual, in a light, open net, I dismissed my tired maid Roper, and sat down before the open window to think over the occurrences of the day.

Prominently forward stood the revelation of Charles Beechley's love for my ungrateful self, together with astonishment that quiet, apparently unobservant grandmamma had been, she confessed, perfectly conscious of the same from the first.

That she had not disapproved of his affec-

tion caused me no surprise, for there were few men of our acquaintance—if any, indeed—for whom she entertained so sincere a regard, or, despite the still locked up chamber, so high an opinion, as she did for our good old rector's son.

The night was so warm, and, though weary, I felt so sleepless, that, preferring my easy-chair to the bed, I sat musing in a dreamy sort of way far into the night, when suddenly my eye was attracted by a figure in the far distance. It was very distinct, and I marvelled my attention had not been sooner aroused. For some seconds I was doubtful, however, whether it was a man or a woman, as just then it was motionless; but presently I felt certain it was the first.

The night was very still, and the moon poured down a cold, uncertain shower of radiance on lawn and trees and glittering lake, and the far off park, stretching on and away out of sight.

Beside the lake was the man, standing in bold relief against the bright waters, and I watched him curiously—the more curiously, because, by his undecided actions, he seemed

to have no particular motive for being there. Who could he be, wandering at this late hour in our grounds? and what could be his intentions?

Presently he turned, and seemed to me to be coming in the direction of the house, for, after the lapse of a few minutes, the plantation between the lake and Riversdale Court concealed him from my sight. He must, therefore, be approaching through some of the paths intersecting it. My heart throbbed tumultuously as I watched for his emerging from the darkness into light. I had no conception who it could possibly be: the movements, slow, listless, idle, were not those of a gamekeeper, nor were they secretive enough for a poacher. Was it some dishonest person planning to rifle my garden beds of any of the choice flowers? I possessed many rare and beautiful sorts, both of roses and other plants, and took great pride to myself in their successful cultivation, the which I actively assisted in.

Looking at my watch, I found it considerably later than I had supposed—nearly twelve o'clock. Extinguishing my candles to escape observation, and the better to watch the

mysterious figure, I drew down the blind, again seated myself, and looked through a narrow side opening.

I was just debating within myself the course I ought to pursue—whether to awaken Tursey and advise some of the men being sent out to ascertain the true state of the case, or that I should try first and, if possible, discover who it was; every poor person's face for miles round being as well known to me as my own—or nearly so—when the matter was settled for me by the mysterious object walking out into the full moonlight and there standing.

For some seconds his back was towards me; he appeared to be gazing apprehensively at a side portion of the building; so at least it seemed to me.

The obscurity of my room admitted of my observing keenly without being seen. And did I not look and look—scarcely believing the evidence of my senses! The figure had turned, and was now standing immovably at my window. It was Charles Beechley.

Poor Charles! how spectral he looked as there he stood, with arms crossed, ghastly face, and still as death! And well I knew the

motive that had brought him to our grounds at that midnight hour—his love for me. How extraordinary! What was there in such an inexperienced girl as myself to excite so violent a passion in a man of his stern, cold nature?—but if not cold, certainly hard and unyielding; the last man in the world, I should have thought, likely to be so subjugated.

Presently he walked to a bench some paces distant, and, sitting down, leaned back covering his face with his hand. Not long did he so remain; again rising, he once more stood contemplating the house, then began to walk in a rapid, agitated manner to and fro.

My long friendship with Charles had opened up to me the peculiarities of his character, and the meaning of these restless gestures and movements was clear to me. He was mentally miserable beyond the control of endurance; evidently so miserable that a sensation of nervous apprehension, undefined and painful, began to take possession of me. He was a man of uncontrollable violence of character, of wild, impetuous passions, which had already hurried him into the committal of acts whose fatal consequences had shadowed his whole life

since ; and now, what brought him here ? Yes, I was the indirect cause, but what was the direct motive for this unseasonable visit to Riversdale Court ?

These distressing thoughts strengthened when, after another lingering look at my window, he abruptly turned, quitted the moon-lit lawn, and was the next instant lost amid the leafy gloom of the plantations.

Where was he going to ? back to the lake ? and with a cold shudder I bethought me of those dark parts where the waters, shadowed by overhanging trees and bushes, lay so frightfully, treacherously deep and black, presenting such cruel facilities for self-destruction. Was that where he was hurrying to ?

These mental questionings accelerated every pulse in my body to a speed that would not allow that same body to rest in peace, and, hastily jumping up, I without further reflection resumed the light muslin worn during the day, and, throwing a summer mantle over my shoulders, noiselessly hurried from my room and the house, and sped through the grounds to the lake. Bear in mind that my feelings regarding Charles were so entirely those of a

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sister for an elder brother, towards whom she entertains as much fear as love, that notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, the solitude, and peculiarity of circumstance in every way, not a sensation of impropriety caused me to hesitate for a moment.

On I ran, pursuing the path I concluded Charles had taken, running so fast indeed that the net decently confining my over-abundant hair (I had forgotten bonnet or hat in my haste) fell off, and thus setting my tresses at liberty, down they tumbled, enveloping my neck and shoulders with a thick veil. I must have made an excellent representation of a youthful Meg Merrilies, was my afterthought; but just then I little heeded personal appearance, and, scarcely conscious of my loss, sped on, straining my eyes to catch sight of that form which never before had I longed so anxiously to see.

I was nearing the lake, and had burst from shade into light, speeding on yet faster, when an exclamation arrested my steps. Looking in the direction of the sound, to my intense relief I saw Charles standing beside a seat, from which, in his astonishment at so extraordinary

an apparition as myself, he had just risen.

“Oh, Charley, I am so glad I have found you!” was the strange, perplexing greeting I panted forth while hastening towards him. “Why are you out here at this time of night? are you ill?”

“Why am I out here at this time of night?” he repeated in a bewildered, amazed tone; “good Heavens, child, what brings you out here? Are you mad? Why are you so glad you found me?”

My present wild proceedings had been rushed into so rapidly, so unreflectingly, that now, when called upon for an explanation of the same, I was quite unable under existing circumstances to give any, and could only stammer, ashamed and confused,—

“I could not sleep, and was sitting at my window, and saw you, and—and—could not imagine, feared—feared you were ill, and so I—”

There was nothing extraordinary after all in a studious, meditative man like Charles taking a ramble on so glorious a night as this in preference to going to bed. When I found

him he was apparently enjoying the quiet and picturesque beauty of the place and hour, nothing more; and how could I tell him I thought he meditated self-murder, and for that reason I had followed him?

While blundering through my answer, Charles with a couple of strides stood close before me, gazing down with glowing eyes at my unadorned figure, my bonnetless head, and dishevelled hair.

“Why did you follow me?” he asked, presently, in a low, hoarse voice, so unlike his own I should not have recognized it had I not seen him. “Why, in Heaven’s name, girl, did you come to this lonely place?—alone, at dead of night, after me?—me of all—all people in the world? Why did you?” he exclaimed, with sudden fierceness, stamping his foot on the gravel, and grasping my arm so tightly I felt as if it were in the grip of a vice, so mercilessly, indeed, that traces of blue finger-marks remained for days after. Frightened as much as bewildered by this ungracious return for the trouble I had taken, I replied in broken, incoherent sentences,—

“Because, Charles, I saw you walking up

and down on the lawn as if you were—were ill or unhappy, or something; and I was so sorry for you—so frightened, I mean. For, oh, Charley, I love you as a sister, indeed I do; I love you sincerely, though you do scold me so much and think me so silly, and I should be wretched, so very, very wretched, if—if—”

“Go home, girl,” he gasped, evidently unconscious he retained his resistless hold of my arm; “go home—at once—while I have power left to let you do so! For the sake of everything dear in heaven and earth, go at once!—at once!”

I was terrified half out of my wits by his manner, words, and voice, and stared at him in speechless astonishment.

His countenance was horrible to see, his eyes glowing and glaring, his clenched teeth gleaming between his parted lips. I could only look, unable to speak or move.

Suddenly, as if I had struck him, he released his hold of my arm and stepped back; whereupon, without an instant's further delay, I turned, and, impelled by an undefined feeling of danger, flew back to the house with even greater velocity than I had come.

Twice I gave a scared glance behind during my flight, and was each time greatly comforted to see that Charles did not follow me—that he still stood where I left him. Presently the winding of the path quite concealed him from my view.

Noiselessly I gained my room, having carefully locked all the doors as before (I felt a nervous anxiety on that point), and then I sat down to recover my senses and my breath.

“Well,” murmured I, “if that was not a strange adventure I do not know what is! and all passed so rapidly, too!” I pushed the hair far back from my heated face and forehead, cooling both with eau de cologne. “What a savage he is!” I continued. “The idea of his being in such a rage that he could (I am certain of it) scarcely refrain from striking me because I ran after to help or comfort him, thinking he was ill or unhappy! By-the-bye, did I tell him—for I was really so dazed at the time I quite forget—of my frantic notion that he was meditating suicide? If I did, no wonder he was in a passion! It would be a sort of aggravating case of insult added to

injury to accuse a man you had refused to marry of an intention to kill himself for love of you, when not the remotest idea of so distinguishing himself had entered his clever head, or was ever likely to do so. My goodness! what a fearful temper his disappointment has aroused in him! Poor dear Charley! and so little as I am worth it! But, positively, I think, if I had not ingloriously taken to my heels as I did, a ducking in the cool waters of the lake would have turned out the crowning reward of my midnight philanthropy! Judging by Master Charley's expression of countenance, I feel sure he would have quite enjoyed such a summary mode of punishing my ungrateful want of appreciation of his merits and his flattering selection of myself."

For half an hour longer I sat watching within the window-blind, but saw no more of Charles that night.

CHAPTER IV.

EXTRACTS FROM SARIANN'S DIARY.

I WAS too tired yesterday evening, after the labours of the village fête, to enter any of the day's proceedings in my journal. Moreover, I was full of heart-anxieties. Towards the close, when the cottagers were departing, I missed Charles and Ennis from the orchard, and marvelled, aye, and troubled too, upon Harry Dormer's telling me (he spoke with a most rueful face, poor lad, bringing bygone days to my memory) that he saw them walk away together.

Ennis returned in time for tea, but not so Charles: he came not at all. She wore an abstracted and worried air, very unlike her old self; and I thought there was a half-frightened look in her beauteous countenance,

the which perplexed and surprised me to see. What had again passed 'twixt herself and Charles ?

Happily none heeded these tokens of discomfiture, save my anxious self—unless, indeed, Harry Dormer, whom I perceived to be eyeing her suspiciously ; and anon he tried, in his frank, kind-hearted way, to cheer her, aye, and I am sure, to cover her confusion from others by gaily aiding her in the operation of tea-making.

Ere leaving Riversdale Court, Ennis whispered she had somewhat to say to me the next day. Ah me ! I already know more on the subject than she wots of : I learned it this morning.

Till one of the clock I waited up for Charles ; he had not returned that evening, and, knowing his at times irritable disposition, deemed it injudicious to tarry longer, as he had a latch-key wherewith to admit himself.

At breakfast this morning, Charles made show to be cheery of spirit, and right willing to partake of our pleasant meal ; albeit, when he and I were alone together, a cloud more dark than that which shadowed him when first

he returned to his forsaken home now rested on his countenance.

We were in the garden ; I had gone thither by reason of its sweetness and quiet, which methought might soothe him into confidence. The while I occupied me tying up a recreant rose-branch laden with blossoms, he stood beside silently watching ; then, in a dejected, lifeless sort of voice, quoth he,—

“Sariann, did Ennis say anything of me last night ?—anything of what passed between us in the shrubbery at Riversdale Court ?”

“No ; not a word,” said I : “she seemed out of spirits. But, even had she desired it, there was no opportunity for our holding any private conversation during my short stay.”

Again he was silent, and yet, methought, appeared anxious to tell me of his trouble. But he said nought, whereupon I considered it best to help him ; and so,—

“Dear Charles, I think I know, without your telling me, what passed between you last night ; but Ennis is still so young—little more than a child, and so inexperienced : remember that, Charles. In two years hence she will think and feel so differently on all subjects ; and if, in

the mean time, you try to be as often in her company as possible, that she may learn to appreciate your many good qualities—your unrivalled intellectual abilities—and then—”

To my astonishment he on the sudden turned angrily upon me, with kindling eyes and flushed cheeks.

“Wait the pleasure of any girl on earth to learn to love me!” quoth he, scornfully; “wait years for her to find out whether my merits are of sufficient weight in the scales of her capricious fancies to counterbalance my demerits! *I* play such a schoolboy part!—never! You mean it kindly, Sariann,” he added, in gentler tone, “but you talk nonsense; do not say such things to me: you only prove how little you understand my character by advice so unsuitable to it.”

“Do not be angry, dear Charley,” I said; “I am very sorry I vexed you, and will not do so again.”

Rash promise! I a second time offended his aching spirit e’en now. “Charley” is Ennis Denzell’s familiar term of address—and only hers—and the mention thereof struck a chord that sent a discordant jar through his o’ertight-

ened soul which nigh drove him wild with grief. For a while he spoke not again, but strode to and fro the path, after his fashion when inwardly stirred. It seems strangely inconsistent to me, this union of overpowering love and the fierce, unyielding pride opposed to it.

Fearing to again pain or anger him, I knew not what to say. Charles is no ordinary being to be soothed, comforted, or wooed into tranquillity as are others; wherefore I worked at my roses with outward pretence of heeding him not, albeit privately much perturbed concerning the poor, unhappy fellow.

Presently he came and stood beside me, and, in a dreary, listless voice, saith he,—

“Sariann, I shall leave Riversdale to-day; I cannot stay here—it is all hateful to me! I can’t bear it—in fact I am going directly. Robert will bring my portmanteau; for myself, I prefer walking to the cross-roads, and there waiting for the coach.”

He said no more, and gazed abstractedly on the ground.

I was dreading this, and my heart throbbed with vague fears. Where was he going to?

And for how long time? For many doleful years as before?

“One thing I want you to promise me, dear Sariann,” he resumed, suddenly, “and I know that a promise from you will be held sacred.”

“What is it, Charles?” quoth I, feeling all the blood forsaking my cheeks, he looked so sad and grave.

“Promise to take as tender, loving, constant care of—of Ennis as though she were a young sister—as though she were Edith.”

He spoke slowly, and with much effort to make steady and distinct his quivering voice.

“Especially,” said he, “guard her from these Riversdale people—men and women—to whom her rare charms and fascinations, her bewitching simplicity, innocence, and sweetness, will unfortunately—most unfortunately for her welfare—render her irresistibly attractive. Guard her from them, Sariann, as you would from the devil and his crew. She values your opinion above all others; therefore you of all people can best serve her. Lady Denzell’s age and infirmities utterly preclude her being of any protection in such a case; moreover, she does not understand the danger of the poor child’s posi-

tion as I do, nor can I make her see it as she ought."

"My love for Ennis is my promise, dear Charles," said I; "nevertheless, I give it you also in words from my heart and soul. Were I indeed her sister you could not leave her in more anxiously careful hands; rest assured of that."

For thanks, Charles put his arm round me, and embraced me with a silent earnestness that, all unusual as it was, increased yet more my apprehensions.

"I know not why I thus continue troubling myself about her," said he, sighing hopelessly; "she never will—never can—be more to me than she is at present. It is not in mortal power to love her with greater intensity than I now do; and time—of that I feel certain—will but weaken, not strengthen, any kind of affection her childlike heart entertains for me."

A silence followed, and anon Charles made a movement to leave me; whereupon I plucked up courage and said, gently, "Dear Charles, when will you come again?"

"I do not know—I cannot say," he answered, impatiently, and chafing under my restraint

and questions, for, laying my hand on his arm soothingly, I went on, "Oh, Charles, do not forget our poor father! Bear in mind, I entreat you—yes, bear it in mind, my beloved brother, amid all your own troubles—how greatly he will miss you if a long period intervenes ere he sees you again. Remember, too, his advanced age and many infirmities; and—"

"It is useless talking to me, Sariann," he broke in almost fiercely; "you know not how useless! I cannot tell you when I may return—I never do know—I never care to know (Heaven help me!), and less now than ever."

He looked so ill, his sad face was so wan and wretched, and his tone and manner so full of a sort of reckless desperateness, that I felt cut to the heart, and could not speak for weeping.

"Poor brother! poor kind brother! My sorrow grieved him much; and again embracing me tenderly, he murmured, in an agitated voice, "Leave me to my miserable self, dear Sariann; it is best, believe me. Did you know all—all—you—I am unlike every other man."

Then added he, wildly, "How can it be different? how can it be wondered at? And now—now that my last hope is destroyed, my one last, long-treasured hope of happiness shattered—shattered!—well, if Heaven does not pity and help me—" and, almost thrusting me aside, forth he dashed from the garden, and—ah me!—I know not when I shall see him again.

For a brief while I relieved my heart by a good cry. Anon I thought of Ennis. Did I regret her refusal of my poor brother? Truly I grieve for him from my inmost soul; but, no—no. A direful, horrible suspicion has of late possessed me concerning him; no, I would not it were otherwise. If I am wrong, I pray God to mercifully forgive me; but if right, then, my heavenly Father, pity, help, and guide thy afflicted servants!

I went, according to promise, to see Ennis this afternoon. She was out tending her flowers, and looked fresh and lovely as the blossoms over which she was bending. We stayed not in the garden, but strolled on to the seat where Ennis, the evening before, dealt the awakening

blow to my poor brother's love-dream—the death-blow to his hopes. And here she told me all—to wit.

“And fancy,” quoth she, “his ungraciously commanding me to immediately go home!” and Ennis laughed with recovered gaiety. Ah! little kens the maiden of the sepulchre she maketh so merry over! She thinks it was but a passing whim which seized Charles, “whose failure he is,” said she, “perhaps now thankfully rejoicing at.”

“Look here!” she went on, laughing with much amusement, and baring her comely white arm to the elbow, and showing red and purple finger-marks on the soft flesh, “my patience! what a vice-like grip it was! You may imagine, Sariann, when I got my arm away, there was no lack of readiness on my part to obey his order to go home; I ran so fast I almost felt as if I was flying. I know I was not conscious that my feet trod on anything more substantial than air. He shall see this when he comes next,” she added, pointing to her rounded arm, and looking upon the cruel marks with a winsomely comic expression of amusement and curiosity. “Fancy ordering me

away, yet gripping me the while in this fashion !”

“Every trace will have disappeared long ere that day arrives,” said I ; a sigh escaping me, laden with an indefinable weight of woe such as had never even shadowed her blithesome spirit for one passing minute.

CHAPTER V.

ARRIVED AT THE CASTLE.

ONE day, towards the latter end of September, two months after my midnight adventure, a rumour entered Riversdale, and, flowing over valley, village, and neighbourhood, roused the hitherto tranquil country into a very ferment of excitement and expectancy.

The duke and his family were coming to the Castle some day that week! Such was the report; and it was curious, as well as sad, to see how even the mere announcement commenced to work evil.

Among the best regulated communities are always to be found certain disaffected, ill-disposed characters, and Riversdale was no exception to this rule, despite "the high moral standing" pompously attributed to it by our worthy old butler, Jeffry. By this time it was

a well-known fact to the inhabitants far and near that the principles and manners of the expected great family, and indeed of their entire household, were of a totally different style to those of the old resident gentry, who for so many generations had religiously watched over and guarded their interests, temporal and eternal.

Now, while with the majority this charitable care was appreciated and successful, there remained a few who, as I say, were in their hearts disinclined to any such moral restraint, and but required the smallest temptation and evil example to slip aside from the narrow but peaceful path of virtue, out upon the broad road leading to destruction. Yes, even now the poison was beginning to act, and disloyalists of both sexes were for the first time to be seen idling about the streets of an evening, and especially at the village inn, the Bell.

Much against the host's will was this wasteful gossiping of the idle round and within the hostel door; for the Harrises were good Christian people, and their honest management of the Bell had always given great satisfaction to the well-wishers of Riversdale.

Yet more objectionable were the eager, hopeful opinions which in, as yet, subdued tones the disaffected expressed to all who would listen (and unhappily there were not a few of even the right thinking who refused to do so) concerning "the grand family as was a-coming among 'em, and who knewed a deal more of the world and its real ways than did any of the gentry-folks hereabouts; for they, the dook and his people, had all been to forren parts, and was not that there foolish strict and 'ticular about nothing, as was others they knewed of."

These sentiments, and many more like them, soon came to be proclaimed openly with shameless look and voice, and, like a noxious atmosphere issuing from long-concealed impure holes and corners, they spread and spread around the healthy air, tainting and lessening its purity, if not actually infecting it with the direful disease with which their every breath was laden.

All the young ladies of the country—among whom I am ashamed to say I must in honesty include myself—were thoughtlessly delighted at the prospect of the abundant and splendid

gaiety opening up to the hitherto remarkably quiet neighbourhood—all excepting Sariann and Dora Bell.

But Sariann, whose perceptive powers were (so she expressed it) sharpened by her patriotic love of her native place, perceived from the first that little cloud in the far horizon, no bigger than a man's hand, which afterwards rose higher and higher, and spread, dark, dangerous, and wide, until the whole sky was obscured by its defacing, tempest-fraught presence.

Now, although I did not then see any just cause for the apprehension felt by so many at the approaching invasion, I could not witness the anxiety of those I loved and esteemed without its greatly damping the ardour of my pleasurable anticipations, and exciting feelings of anger against myself for encouraging thoughts and wishes so opposite to theirs.

On Thursday flew a telegram to the Castle, announcing the coming of the family that evening. Nor was the Riversdale public again disappointed; and on the succeeding Sunday morning no one, I regret to say, looked forward with more curiosity than did I to

seeing some, at least, of the party within our village church.

Never before, on God's holy day, had my thoughts been so sadly engrossed by the vanities of personal appearance as upon this memorable occasion; nor had I ever felt so dissatisfied with the result of my laboured preparations when finally surveying myself in the huge old-fashioned mirror. Three handsome dresses had I flourished in its disapproving face, the last being merely retained from very shame of my weakness and folly in presence of my surprised abigail. But Roper was a good-natured creature, and still young enough to be sympathetic, as her untiring patience throughout and encouraging admiration testified.

“There! that's quite beautiful, Miss Emmy!” was the rapturous verdict upon each experiment. “I am sure no one in the church (or in the whole county for that matter),” this latter in a sort of aside, “will be to compare to you!”

But nothing pleased me; and the *finale* was, in my blind-eyed ignorance, as gloomily contemplated as were the two preceding toilets.

“There! nothing can be beautifuller, Miss Enny; so run away now, or you will keep your grandmamma waiting,” urged poor Rosser, evidently fearing, from the ominous expression of my face and certain doubtful glances at the fourth robe lying on the bed, that a trial of its capabilities was also pending. “Besides, *I* shall be late for church if I bide here any longer,” she continued; “and if you were to put fifty dresses on you couldn’t look no nicer—you couldn’t indeed, dear Miss Enny: so now run away.”

The secret anxiety I felt to make a first favourable impression on the new arrivals was wholly unconnected with my thought of their superior rank.

As Monica gaily said, “our own and the adjoining counties abounded in such commodity,” and though not, of course, so high in degree, was nevertheless sufficiently important, to say nothing of my own aristocratic descent, to have kept me from childhood too familiar with high birth and noble lineage to be in any way disconcerted by companionship even with those whose social position, I was well aware, towered considerably above my own. But it

was their style of life, so totally different to all I had been accustomed to, their residence abroad for years, enriching them, no doubt, with a bewitching variety of accomplishments, of foreign refinements, fashionable manners, and world-wide experiences. This, and perhaps considerably more, of which in my rustic simplicity I as yet knew not the existence, filled my girl's heart with humiliating feelings of inferiority, and of apprehension that the Ladies Riphon might possibly consider me too ignorant and silly to be worthy of their friendship or even their acquaintance. And, after my vain boastings, how delighted Charles would be ! and how he would laugh at me in his cynical, aggravating manner !

The walk through our park to the village church was not more than an easy half-mile, and in fine weather grandmamma and I generally proceeded thither on foot, I of course supporting her with my strong young arm, and taking our time, which was always a very pleasant one to us both.

It was a sweet morning,—a quiet, cloudy day, whose heavy, flower-scented atmosphere and extreme stillness are the frequent forebodings

of an evening thunder-storm ; but now the weather was delightful. I saw by the hasty glance grandmamma gave me that the more than usual attention I had bestowed on my toilet did not escape her observation ; but, with the exception of an anxious, loving smile, not intended for me to see, nothing further on the subject passed between us.

It was evident a strong under-current of excited expectancy was stirring the hearts of the little church community when we entered, ruffling the surface equanimity of even some of the most sober-minded of the congregation. There was a perpetual turning of heads and eyes with every fresh arrival, and eager glances in the direction of the door upon the driving up of vehicles of any kind. By degrees this subsided into looks of annoyed disappointment as the holy service commenced unattended by the presence of the duke or any of his family.

During the reading of the Psalms, two men in livery and three showily dressed maid-servants sauntered up the aisle, staring about with a bold, irreverent expression as they entered the servants' pew belonging to the Castle.

CHAPTER VI.

A PERILOUS ADVENTURE.

My grandmother's advanced age and delicate health prevented her attendance a second time at church on the Sunday; therefore in the evening, as was my habit, I sped across the park to the Rectory to accompany Sariann.

It seemed that public curiosity was not a second time to be merely expended on the more inferior beings of the Castle humanity, for on nearing the sacred edifice we saw a barouche and a splendid pair of iron-grey horses—all new to us—rapidly approaching. Their speed scarcely abated as they advanced closer, and sent flying right and left, like chaff before the wind, a crowd of small boys standing in the road, watching with wide-awake eyes and mouths the coming vehicle.

At that moment, hobbling towards the church

door, wholly unconscious, because of deafness, of the nearness of the carriage behind him, was a poor, crippled man—Bill Dubbs, a village shoemaker. He was a pious, good creature, a great favourite of grandmamma's and mine, and, indeed, of all who knew him, being of a singularly kind and cheerful temper.

“Oh, look, Sariann!” cried I, in a sudden agony of terror; “there is poor old Dubbs in the road, just in the way of the carriage, and he is deaf, you know, and does not hear it coming! Oh, what can we do? He will be run over, for they will not see him till too late! What a shame to drive so fast! Dubbs! Dubbs!” I called, wildly. “Oh, he cannot hear me! he—”

I did not wait to utter another word, to think another thought—the poor creature was in peril of his life—the carriage was approaching a sharp corner of the road which would bring it upon him in two or three moments more. Sariann stood paralyzed in speech and movement; and, singular as unfortunate, not one of the many strong men usually standing without and within the church-porch happened at that moment to be there. Bounding for-

ward, I grasped Dubbs by the arm, and strove with all my might to pull him aside beyond reach of horses and wheels. To effect this I was forced to run backwards, and, in so doing, trod on my dress, and fell to the ground, dragging the old cripple with me. The next instant the horses' heads were almost over us, and, but for the strong and sudden violence with which they were reined in, bringing the astonished and terrified animals on their haunches, and nearly throwing carriage and all into a neighbouring ditch, the four huge hoofs, pawing and prancing in the air, would have descended upon our prostrate forms and mangled us frightfully, if not fatally.

What an opening scene to my acquaintance with the Ladies Riphon!

Recovering my senses and my feet with greater celerity than I had lost them, I staggered to one side supported by Sariann, at the same time that the groom, springing to the ground, conveyed Bill Dubbs (also uninjured) out of harm's way. Being one of those unreasonable people who, when frightened, generally relieve their perturbed feelings by flying into a passion, I now turned fiercely upon the

authors of our accident. I felt my eyes flash as if on fire, and, clutching Sariann's arm to steady my trembling limbs, and addressing the coachman, but especially the groom, who was nearest to me, panted out,—

“How dare you drive so fast—to the—church-door!—and round that corner too—and not able to see—who—might be just in your way! How dare you do it!—you might have killed us both!”

I am quite sure that never before, even in the reproving presence of their ducal master, had the two men felt so cowed as by this attack, coming as it did from so wholly unexpected a quarter. They reddened violently, the tall, before independent-looking groom shrinking back and down, as though fearing I might in my wrath be tempted to try the strength of my hand as well as my tongue by boxing his already astonished ears.

“I am very sorry: I trust you are not hurt?” interposed a calm, pleasant-toned voice by my side—that of a gentleman of about four or five and twenty, who had, Sariann told me, jumped from the barouche and come forward as I spoke.

He raised his hat, repeating his question with increased earnestness as I turned and faced him,—

“I *hope* you are not hurt?”

I was still too agitated to be either confused or easily appeased, and answered with only slightly abated warmth, for indeed the fire of my indignation burned much more hotly against the possessors than the hirelings of the carriage.

“No—thank you—I am not hurt—nothing to signify, at least; nor the poor old man, fortunately.” His eyes followed mine, which glanced in the direction of Mr. Dubbs, who was seated under a tree, wiping his face with his handkerchief, and looking miserably white and scared, “But such a frightful accident,” I continued, “might have produced any amount of injury—involving loss of life even!”

These concluding words were uttered in a tone of angry indignation, strengthened, I could feel, by a very unamiable expression in my eyes and flushing in my pale cheeks; for, instead of the anxious concern and commiseration I justly expected, an irrepressible smile of amusement played over his haughty features

as he glanced from the poor shoemaker to my soiled and rumpled dress and my once-beautiful, highly prized bonnet, now crushed out of all shape and position.

“Of course it might. Any injury indeed!” he rejoined, with quickly subdued voice and look. “Be more cautious for the future, Burton” (addressing the coachman), “and make a rule of driving slowly as you near that ugly corner.”

Sariann now gently impelled me to the church-door, and bowing coldly I walked on, stopping as we passed to say a few words of congratulation and thankfulness for our mutual escape to poor old Dubbs.

We had just gained our pew (I sat of an evening with Sariann in the Rectory seat, which commanded a disagreeably distinct view of the great, newly velveted pew belonging to the Castle) when a rustling sound made me look up.

Floating down the centre aisle, their light, delicate dresses enveloping their forms like a cloud, richly trimmed, flounced, and furbelled, and diffusing an exquisite perfume that rapidly pervaded the whole interior of the building, came two pretty, elegant girls, accom-

panied by my gentleman acquaintance at the church-door. These were, I felt sure, the Ladies Riphon and their eldest brother.

In appearance the latter was of middle height, a manly, well-formed figure and singularly handsome head and face. An unmistakable stamp of high birth and refined education and habits marked his features, indeed his whole person and general bearing ; but his good looks were, in my opinion, greatly marred by the proud, unamiable expression of his long dark eyes. I was not certain, however, that this did not result from a haughty, supercilious habit he had contracted of generally holding back his head and viewing people and things from under his half-closed, drooping lids.

On the Sunday evening in question this manner' did not strike me : the one glance bestowed on poor Dubbs displeased me because utterly wanting in feelings of humanity, and plainly saying,—so I thought at least,—“ Yes, what in the name of wonder induced you to risk your life in such a frantic way for that old creature ? ”

To my annoyance, which by degrees worked into a feeling of indignation, he and his

sisters throughout the service directed their attention principally to our pew. Nor did any feeling of vanity help to mitigate my discomfiture, being quite persuaded that to the philanthropic act by which I had just distinguished myself was I indebted for this marked notice.

“No doubt they are thinking me a curious, interesting specimen of the rustic maidens of Riversdale, and worthy of a more than usually critical observation!” were my indignant reflections, “and that, during all their foreign wanderings, sight-seeings, and experiences in natural and artificial objects of wonderment, they have never seen anything so strange as this wild girl, who actually rushed under their horses’ heads at the risk of her life, to save—yes, and succeeded, too!—a poor old crippled man from being trampled to death.”

I was the more foolishly disconcerted by the unrestrained scrutiny of these three pair of eyes because, although Sariann had done her best to set me to rights—dusted my dress, straightened my bonnet, &c., I knew well my carefully prepared toilet had been too effectually disarranged to be thus easily restored to its

original condition, and was at present to the last degree unrepresentable. That admiration of any kind influenced the conduct of the brother and sisters was an idea that did not for an instant enter my head as possible.

Directly the service ended (by the way, I had far better have remained at home for any spiritual benefit my soul derived that evening) Sarianm and I hastened to the vestry, as was generally our custom, to wait for Dr. Beechley, and accompany him to the Rectory, which lay between the church and Riversdale Court.

The pious society of father and daughter, their noble-hearted sentiments and feelings, so free from every taint of worldly vanity, cheered me and finally restored my equanimity.

Their praise, too, and pleasure at my rescue of poor Dubbs filled my whole soul with satisfaction, for they both assured me I had been mainly if not wholly instrumental in saving the good old man's life or limbs. Oh, how contemptible, by comparison, seemed all my weak, silly annoyances in the church! Saved a fellow-creature's life, or his poor body—already by nature maimed—from further frightful injury and from days of agony and helplessness!

"I had a brief account of the affair from Dubbs himself," observed Dr. Beechley; "a very incoherent one too, for his gratitude to the '*angel lady*' was so overpowering it almost deprived him of speech. I made out, however, that if she, regardless of her own safety, had not flown to the rescue, and forcibly pulled him aside, he should in all human probability, and wholly unconscious of his danger, have hobbled so directly in front of the carriage the horses could not have been stopped in time to save him."

"The crushed bonnet and soiled dress are of trifling import after that, are they not, Enny dear?" murmured Sariann, her eyes, as well as mine, misty with tears, and a hot colour coming into my cheeks, for her manner and words proved to me she had detected those feelings of mortified vanity which disconcerted my thoughts so much in church, and of which the healthy atmosphere of her own and father's companionship made me heartily ashamed.

"Poor Dubbs!" resumed Sariann, "he has for years, long before you knew him, been a cripple, and yet by determined industry has maintained his family, unaided by any charity, in comfort and respectability. His youngest

daughter (the two eldest are married) is, you know, a more infirm cripple than he is, and his wife a miserable invalid, and consequently both mainly depend upon him for home and food. What would have been their fate, therefore, if this evening—ah, Enny!” she exclaimed, breaking off abruptly, “I envy you to my heart of hearts the possession of that noble courage and presence of mind which to-day and—yes, and on other occasions enabled you with such self-forgetting promptness of action to save your fellow-creatures from—God alone knows what!”

The expression in her fine face, and trembling of her voice, instantly awakened the suspicion that the *other occasions* referred to my midnight pursuit of Charles in the shrubbery.

“Save my fellow-creatures!” Did she really believe, then, that he meditated self-destruction? If so I had indeed acted most wisely, most happily, in so resolutely following him!

“It was not always thus with you, my daughter,” answered the father, in a fond, assuring voice; “but you have experienced much trouble in your still young life, which has weakened nerves once as strong to bear and to serve as are those of my brave-hearted Ennis.”

CHAPTER VII.

EXTRACTS FROM SARIANN'S DIARY.

WELL, the family—"the grand folks," as doth our poor cottagers call them—are come to the Castle; aye, and I have seen them, and held converse with all save the youngest son, who belongeth to the Royal Horse Guards, and is now with his regiment. Alas! they please me not, and I trouble much at thought of beautiful, impressible Ennis becoming intimate with any member of this soul-deluded family.

My dear father comforted me somewhat this morning when together we spoke on the subject, for said he,—

"Ennis has a noble soul—a strong, clear-sighted soul—not a soul to be easily turned aside—not for long, at least, from the path of love and duty. And she also has a warm and

generous heart; and the two, soul and heart, work lovingly, yes, and for so young a creature wisely, together—a blessed protecting union of strength. It was that rare combination made her rush almost under the horses' feet to save our poor old shoemaker friend; and it is that that will, under God, withhold her from wilfully offending against her Heavenly Father, and thereby rendering those she loves on earth miserable. Do not be unhappy, therefore, on Ennis's account, my child; trust to the protecting care of the Lord, and daily you and I will pray that our young favourite may be preserved from evil in her intercourse with these (alas, I fear me!) godless people."

This, and more which he said—for dearly father loveth Ennis Denzell—consoleth me with hopeful feelings, for truly my heart also inclineth to the sweet child as though she were a sister, and oft-times her presence recalleth, with a painful vividness, those gladsome, albeit sad, bygone days of little Edith.

No, never can I forget that Sunday evening and the horrors of that scene!

"To think that I—years older than she is,

and possessed—so I vainly believed—of double her energy and firmness—to think,” said I, “that she should have so nobly acted, while I—I—what can I say of myself? Nay, I know not. I do not understand it.”

How winsome the dear child looked as afterwards we sat in church! Her glorious eyes were swimming in liquid lustre, driven there by mingled feelings of joy and shame and thankfulness. Annoyed was I by the fulsome admiration expressed in the proud features of the young Marquis of Belford, who scarce removed his bold gaze from her sweet down-bent face whene’er he could see it.

This morning, Monday, father and I deemed it a proper and courteous duty to wait on the family at the Castle; and thereupon off we set.

We drove thither, for the way lying mostly up hill is too wearisome for father to walk, and soon we reached our destination. How grand and sumptuous it all looked! Verily, scarce could I recognize the old time-worn building under its brightened state of modern alterations and adornments.

In one of a suite of apartments, furnished

and bedecked with all that richness the which foreign and English refinements could gather together, sat the duchess and her two eldest daughters.

They were all affable and kind to us, in (so it seemed to me) a patronizing manner. Howbeit, one thing in them was certainly genuine,—they, ere long, took warmly to my noble-countenanced father, whose God-fearing spirit, wont to hold constant loving converse with the King of kings, maintained as unruffled his gentle dignified bearing in company of the duchess—aye, and in that of the duke also, who came in presently—as though he sat him in the home of the humblest of cottagers only.

To one like unto my honoured father what are the greatest potentates on earth in comparison to the Creator of the whole universe, in whose divine presence his soul liveth continually? Albeit he doth ever, with true Christian humility, and that submissive spirit enjoined in God's holy Word, 'render honour unto whom honour is due.' Thus his manner, full of a righteous independence, was winsomely softened by a courteous meekness, which won upon the hearts of these proud people in perchance a

fashion altogether new to them. Yes, I could see the feeling now influencing this thing and that they said and did.

Quoth Lady Hyacinth, the eldest daughter, "Who is that beautiful girl who sat with you in church, Miss Beechley?—a sister? We have all been dying to know the name of the heroine and the beggar! What a Quixotic act, to be sure!—like a scene in a play!" and the maiden laughed—not a pleasant laugh, methought. Just then the Marquis of Belford sauntered in from a conservatory opening into an adjoining room. He carelessly whisked about a beauteous flower he held in his hand, humming a tune the while, nor stopped on perceiving our presence. The duke courteously introduced us, after which the noble youngster sat him down beside Lady Hyacinth and stared at me. Now, had I been younger or more foolish, I might perchance have felt both disconcerted and flattered. Howbeit I was simply amused,—naught more; and a rebel smile I could not control, and which I fear me was tainted somewhat with a sort of little contempt, played over my countenance.

Behaviour so opposite to that which doubt-

less he was accustomed to receive from those humbly born damsels upon whom he vouchsafed to bestow his observation at once turned the tables upon the marquis in a mortifying manner. The colour rushed to his cheeks and brow, and actually drove him to ignominiously resort to his pocket-handkerchief in order to conceal his discomfiture.

“I was talking about that picture-like girl, Algernon,” interposed Lady Hyacinth, an angry look in her haughty face, for she too noted, aye, and in her heart resented, the impertinent smile of the parson’s daughter,—“the girl, I mean, who got up that comic-tragic scene with the crippled beggar”; and the maiden smiled sarcastically, believing Ennis to be a young sister of mine own, or some near relative.

“Ah, yes,” the brother made answer, with recovered composure, “that picture-girl—yes, she is the most perfect picture I ever saw!—beats everything in womankind the world contains. Whoever she may be, she is an incomparable-looking creature: but one opinion can be entertained on that point at least. Pray what is her name, Miss Beechley?”

"Ennis Denzell," said I, gravely, for I liked not the tone of these young people.

"Ennis Denzell," repeated the younger sister, Lady Frances: "those are pretty names, but an odd union. Irish and Scotch are they not?"

"Denzell?" quoth the duke, hearing the name and coming forward, "is that the granddaughter of my friends, Sir William and Lady Denzell? Why, yes, it must be. One of the best fellows living was poor Denzell. I shall be delighted to see his mother; and if Miss Ennis possesses the half only of his wife's good looks, they would make her beautiful."

"Yes," said I, "she is the daughter of Lady Denzell's only son, the present Sir William."

"Yes, I remember that Denzell had a splendidly beautiful daughter-in-law who went to India with her husband. And so this girl resembles her mother! Well then she is as richly dowered as though possessed of a gold-mine."

Said I, "Yes, my lord duke, she so closely resembles a full-length portrait of her mother in Riversdale Court, the picture might better pass for her own than perhaps another painted

expressly for her; and Lady Denzell told me it was a life-like resemblance of her daughter-in-law."

"If her mother was as beautiful as this girl, she must have set every part of India she went to in a blaze!" observed the marquis.

"I think, Frances, we ought, without delay, to call and ascertain how the fair lady is after her philanthropic exploit yesterday. What say you to our going to-morrow?" questioned Lady Hyacinth.

"Oh, by all means let us go!" made ready answer the marquis. "I feel curiously anxious to ascertain whether, on home inspection, her charms prove of as ravishing a character as they appeared in church. Certainly they were then viewed under circumstances of disadvantage before which any other maiden's looks would almost, if not wholly, have been converted into ugliness; but an unbonneted, unadorned house dress, seen in the merciless morning light,—that is the true means of testing a woman's beauty."

The young gentleman spoke in a greatly assumptive tone, looking down upon me with haughty, supercilious eyes, and still playing

with the beauteous flower (I longed to rescue it from his despoiling hand); and continued he, glancing at his sisters and smiling, "I wonder how either of you would have borne such a mad derangement of your toilet. Be wise, girls, and do not allow any ambitious feelings of rivalry to tempt *you* to make any philanthropic experiments of that kind; you will not find it answer, believe me."

"*I!* or *Frances!*" made answer Lady Hyacinth, in voice—ah me!—of such unholy scorn as I have never before heard break from Christian maiden's lips, and which I pray I may not again.

"For shame, Lady Cinth!" saith the marquis, in grave, mocking tones; "those three words, so uttered, '*I!* or *Frances!*' simple and brief though they are, bespeak, I regret to say, a most unregenerate, ill-regulated mind! Look you, you young sinners, how astonished Miss Beechley is at the unrighteous sentiment they imply—"

"Yes; be sure and go to-morrow to inquire for the fair heroine," wisely interposed the Duke—"you, Reginald, and Cinthia. But bear in mind, boy, that, however lightly you

may regard the noble act performed by Miss Denzell, it is not probable either she or her grandmother are disposed to treat as an amusing joke a case the issue of which might have involved the loss of life. If, therefore, you and the girls seem to take that uncomplimentary view of the matter, depend upon my word you will mortally offend the old lady if not the young one, and had better not go to them."

"And my brief experience of Miss Denzell warned me she is not a damsel to be offended with impunity," saith the marquis.

His smile is like to Lady Hyacinth's, and not pleasant. Nor like I the expression of his face, albeit the form thereof and the features are exceedingly comely. And he seems of an indolent, self-loving nature, that regards the troubles of others as naught to him, and as who would say, "Why should they be?" Yes, verily, this very morning, during converse, he did boast that chosen for his motto is the unrighteous saying, "Each man for himself, and God for us all." Most mistaken words! God is not, never will be, the friend and protector of those who live only for themselves; and if they awake not in time to a knowledge of that same,

all too late will they find how all-powerless is their own strength, unaided from on high, to secure them true felicity either in this world or the next.

"You need not fear any failure of diplomacy on my part whenever a beautiful woman is to the fore," rejoined the marquis. "I assure you the whole bulk of that gallantry for which, as you know, I am remarkable—and which I have inherited from yourself, most noble pater—shall be brought into full practice on the occasion in question. If you had been at the church yesterday you would have wondered at and admired my forbearance, ignorant though I was then of the lady Quixote being Miss Denzell."

"In what way was your forbearance exercised, marquis?" quoth I, smiling dubiously; "or rather on what point were you called upon to exercise it towards my friend?"

"If you had heard a few of our opinions afterwards, Miss Beechley, especially Belford's," interrupted Lady Hyacinth, with a haughty elevation of her head, peculiar to herself and brother, "you would hardly consider that question necessary."

“But as I did not,” answered I, smiling, with in no way disconcerted feelings, “you must excuse my again repeating it.”

Lady Hyacinth liked not this straightforward questioning; doubtless it was altogether new to her, coming from one whom perchance in her proud heart she regarded as much her inferior. She remained silent, therefore, looking angry and perplexed, and the red colour mounting to her cheeks.

Saith the duke, laughing good-humouredly, for he saw that the young folks had unwittingly run themselves into a close corner from whence there was no escape save by a discourteous brushing against myself,—

“Believe me, Miss Beechley, if you take upon you the trouble of endeavouring to ascertain the meaning and motive of half my son’s observations you will find the task as profitless to yourself as it would be difficult, if not impossible, for him to explain to you.”

“Very true, most noble father,” said the young nobleman, with a light laugh, shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows in foreign fashion. Thereupon the duke, who is a vastly merry old gentleman, again laughing, returned

to my father, who was sitting at some distance apart with the duchess.

“I will tell you a speech of Belford’s as we were driving home from church, Miss Beechley,” quoth Lady Frances, whose countenance was pleasant and genial, like unto her father’s—the two elder children resembled their mother. “Was it not vain of him? He said, ‘It is not the *act* I condemn, but the *object* of it. Had it been my noble self, for instance, whom the valorous maiden did with her dainty hands (and they are right dainty hands, I know, for I saw them when she took off her gloves) drag out of danger’s way, *that* would have been a most proper, praiseworthy proceeding; but that dirty, misshapen, wretched apology for humanity—to risk her precious life for a creature like that!’”

“Do you remember the story of Lazarus, one of the most miserably afflicted of beggars?” quoth I, gravely.

The marquis with puzzled, questioning look turned to his sisters.

“It is in the Bible,” answered Lady Hyacinth, mentioning that most holy of books in a tone that sorrowed me greatly to hear from the

lips of so young a maiden. Verily it would have grieved me had any one thus spoken.

The brother said no more; but whether his forbearance was the result of better principles or better breeding, or whether he deemed me worthy of the exercise of a portion of that diplomatic gallantry of which he boasted, I know not. Methought, if the latter be the case, Ennis is the exciter thereof, I the medium.

And now my father arose, and we took our departure.

“Well, and how did you and the duchess get on together, dear father?” quoth I. “You seemed to be talking very earnestly to her whenever I looked at you both.”

“Yes, my child,” said he, “I did talk very seriously to her. My time for doing God’s work on earth may now be but short, and I am keenly anxious to lose none of it.”

I like not to hear him utter those forebodings of himself; howbeit I merely said,—

“Did you, father? What was it about?”

“On the subject most painfully near our hearts at present, Sarianm—the temporal and eternal welfare of our poor people.”

"Oh, I am glad you did, father! They all evidently liked you so greatly that I feel very hopeful any advice of yours will meet with respect and attention."

Father shook his grey head with doubtful look, and said he, thoughtfully,—

"I scattered the seeds: to our Heavenly Father must I leave their growth and increase. It was not perhaps quite in accordance with the fashionable amenities of society to thus seize upon the first moments of acquaintance to bring forward village matters—business matters in fact—but the opportunity was too favourable to be lost; another, so propitious in every way, not only as regarded the affable mood of the lady, but the quietness of the Castle—its absence of visitors—might not soon, if ever, occur again."

"I am so glad you did, darling father!" I repeated, warmly, "so very glad!"

"Yes, my daughter, and so am I. As briefly but forcibly as possible, I described the present moral and physical condition of the Riversdale poor, their reputed character for honesty and industry, and above all (because the fruitful source of all good) their generally pious, God-fearing principles."

“Was she not pleased and interested, dear father?” quoth I, with throbbing heart.

His smile was sad, and said he, evasively,—

“She was very polite and gracious, little daughter; and with that it behoves us to be content for the present. Moreover she promised, with an amused smile I would her fair face had not put on, to willingly second my enthusiastic efforts—so she expressed it—for the good of the village; and particularly to prevent to the best of her power any evil example on the part of her people among the *simple ones*, as she merrily designated our poor country folk.”

CHAPTER VIII.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN SARIANN AND ENNIS.

ON Monday evening Sariann came to see how I was after my adventure, and also to give me an account of her morning's visit to the Castle.

"Well, dear," said I, "I feel, as Harry Dormer expressed it when telling me of his fall while hunting, 'very considerably bruised and uncomfortable, and all that sort of thing, you know.' Ah but, Sariann, place cause against effect, and they do not bear comparison! In truth, my soul's sensations are (I am thankful to say) of so abundantly consoling a character, they would even compensate for a much larger amount of aches and injuries than I am suffering from!"

"I hope you will say that as openly to your

Castle visitors to-morrow, darling," exclaimed Sariann, with a glad, approving smile.

"Yes, that I will."

"Ah, yes; do not let them laugh you out of your good and generous feelings, Enny; do not let them abash you by their senseless ridicule or un-Christian opinions."

"Abash me!" replied I, laughing; "no, indeed, it would not be easy for any one to do that, while under the influence, as I am at present, of such proud, well-satisfied remembrances. Laugh at me!" I repeated, gaily; "I promise you if they do I will tell them they are jealous of me—jealous of a courage they cannot imitate. Not that (*entre nous*, Sariann) there was any real courage in the matter, for had I been aware the carriage was so near I hardly think I should have dared to run such a risk, excepting for some one I loved. Had I stopped to think—alas for poor old Dubbs!—I should have become frightened out of my wits and too bewildered to do anything. Only those who coolly and reflectingly perform brave deeds can, with justice, be considered really courageous; that you know, Sariann dear."

“What time was there for thought?” she replied, smiling. “If you had cautiously waited to determine whether or not it would be prudent for you to assist the deaf man, what meanwhile would have become of him? In my opinion, reflection would but have impelled you the more to act as you did; your benevolent feelings, excited to a white heat, rendered you as powerless to withhold your feet from flying to the rescue as mine were to move.”

“Well, I am glad you think that of me, dear Sariann; it is rather a humiliating idea, certainly, that one is merely the weak slave of impulse, which I know Charley is quite convinced I am—and nothing stronger or better. Poor Charles!” I added, sighing involuntarily, for just then we were strolling up and down the shrubby path which had witnessed two such tragic scenes ’twixt himself and me: his white, hopeless face at our last parting had haunted my memory ever since.

Sariann sighed also as she mournfully echoed my words,—

“Poor Charles!”

Presently she resumed,—

“I wrote him a long letter this afternoon, giving him an account in full of your yesterday’s adventure, and father’s and my visit to the Castle. I can imagine his outspoken exclamation upon reading the first—‘How like Emmy!’”

“Have you heard from him lately?” inquired I.

“Yes—quite lately.”

“Is he still in London?”

“He was when he wrote, but said he intended setting off the next day for Brighton, to have some sea-bathing.”

A long silence followed, which I broke suddenly,—

“Sariann—I cannot say how sorry I am—because of you—that I—I—do not love Charles,” my face burned, “cannot love him sufficiently to wish to be his wife,—it would be so nice for you and me to be *bonâ fide* sisters; but I do not, and cannot, and that is the truth.”

It was a rather incoherent speech; nevertheless Sariann understood me.

“No, dear—never mind,” she answered, in a low, agitated voice; “love him as a brother—I

have no wish you should do more. No nearer connexion could increase our affection for each other: we could not be more thoroughly sisters at heart were that relationship real instead of nominal."

Her first words surprised me: never had she expressed herself so decidedly on this subject.

"Do you really mean that, Sariann?" I questioned,—“really mean you do not *wish* me to love him more than I would a brother?"

Some strong feeling I could not define caused her cheeks to flush and pale alternately; and, in a tone of such unusual impatience, or rather irritation, that my astonishment was yet further increased, she said,—

"Oh, no! not *that* exactly! I do not quite mean that!"

She was silent a few seconds, and so was I, for I knew not what to say. Presently she added, with recovered calmness,—

"Do not let us talk any more about it, dear; the whole affair contains a depth of painfulness to me of which you, in your naturally light view of the matter, can have no conception. Oh, that my poor brother had, as well as your—

self, remained content with a brother's and sister's bond of affection between you!"

"Yes, I wish so to!" I said, earnestly; "more than that, I continually indulge in hopes of such a comfortable state of feeling being some day established between us—some day not far distant either," I added, cheerfully.

Sariann did not answer, and presently I went on,—

"I cannot but think he will ultimately reward poor gentle Dora Bell's devotion to him by marrying her and making a good and kind husband, if not a very loving one. When he returns to Riversdale do let us set our wits to work to bring about so desirable an end, Sariann: what say you, dear?"

"Oh no, Ennis! never, never will I do that!" she replied, hurriedly. "Not for worlds would I say a word to either you or Dora that might in any way bias your feelings and decision on so serious a point as marriage. It is not a case involving merely a few weeks or months, but a life-long period of weal or woe. My own brother, too, the interested object of my persuasions! No: to God I leave everything. He knows all, and therefore knows what is best

for us; and, if we trust in Him faithfully, He will be certain to work altogether for our good."

"But there are all the essentials on both sides for making a happy marriage," I persisted. "Charles would be certain to act honourably and kindly to his wife; and as for his temper—well, it unquestionably *is* of a very inflammable character, but fortunately Dora is blessed with a superabundance of the opposite—sufficient, indeed, for a husband as well as herself; and—"

"Yes," interposed Sariann, speaking slowly and thoughtfully, "poor Charles would make an excellent husband—as far as lies in his power—as far as lies in his power, poor fellow."

"Why do you so emphatically say 'as far as lies in his power,' dear?" I asked, struck by her tone and manner; "do you mean when he is not under the dominion of bad temper? But, as I was saying, Dora's gentle nature will act like oil cast on the raging waters: in fact she is just the right style of woman for such a man; and really it seems to me it would be like bestowing a mine of wealth on some one

whose own possessions made the extracting the treasures from the first unnecessary, and therefore left it unused, to marry Dora to an easy, good-tempered man, who never tried her or drew out the best parts of her disposition and character."

Sariann smiled—"That is your theory, is it, dear? Well, if prudently carried out it might work successfully enough, perhaps."

We had now walked to the banks of the beautiful lake, upon whose clear bosom the last lingering rays of the setting sun were gleaming, and numerous fish plashed in and out of the water in chase of flies and other insects. The surface rippled and circled as though merrily laughing at their playful movements, thereby breaking into many parts the lovely scene clearly depicted on its face as in a mirror—rich foliage, feathery clouds slowly floating over the blue sky, and alternately veiling and revealing the glorious beams of the setting sun.

CHAPTER IX.

CASTLE VISITORS.

“ You see, mammy, how utterly impossible it would be for you to avoid a visiting intimacy, if nothing more, with the Riversdales, though that self-willed Charles insisted upon it you could. Independent of the friendship that existed between the duke and uncle Denzell, your position and that in their near neighbourhood, your well-known character for gentle courtesy, kindness, and hospitality, renders it impossible you should do otherwise than politely, if not cordially, respond to their advances whenever they choose to take the trouble to make known their royal pleasure on that point, and which, it seems, they meditate doing to-day. Now, do not you agree with me, dear mammy ? ”

Grandmamma smiled dubiously, saying,—

“I am afraid, my pet, their royal pleasure, as you call it, would scarcely have so soon asserted its prerogative had there existed no greater inducement for the so doing than my recommendations in any way, or my beloved husband’s bygone friendship for the old duke. No; a one bright and beautiful something and somebody within the ancient walls of Riversdale Court is the attraction—an attraction possessed of ten times more power of alluring the human heart than is contained in the whole domain—house, lands, mistress, and past memories united.”

“Why, who is this somebody or something, grandmamma?” I asked in surprise, for honestly I declare I had not at the moment the faintest notion to what *rara avis* she alluded.

“The marquis would be quite capable of enlightening you were the question presented to him, my little simple-hearted Enny,” replied grandmamma, smiling fondly upon me. She and I sat together as usual in the Oriel Drawing-room after our early dinner: not that I generally remained long indoors at that time of day; either the garden tempted me out, or Sariann or the

Bells—both of whom lived only a good walking distance from the Court—perhaps called for me to take a stroll, long or short as the case might be; or Monica Dormer, whose parents had driven in to pay neighbouring visits, or, as she said, perpetrate some rustic shopping in the village, came flying to our room, all grace and sprightliness to be sure, like the merriest of goldfinches, but, to old Jeffry's exceeding discomfiture, utterly defiant of dignity and propriety—our worthy butler panting after her, vainly striving to gain precedence and announce the high-born damsel in proper form. She and I usually wandered about the gardens chatting and laughing, and into the adjoining lanes to meet the Dormer carriage on its return to Oaklands.

To-day, however, I remained at home, being desirous not to miss seeing the Ladies Riphon, and in truth the Marquis of Belford also; my own confused recollection of him on Sunday evening and Sariann's reluctant account of the whole family, of whom it was clear to me she would not express her real opinion, but leave me to judge for myself, made me very curious on the subject.

Grandmamma and I were just talking about them when the whole party were announced—that is to say, duke, duchess, marquis, and Lady Hyacinth.

The two first seemed genuinely glad to renew their intimacy with my grandmother, especially the noble-looking old duke. For myself, in imitation of her easy, polished composure, I too received the stranger visitors with the best grace I could command; but being unfortunately shy, too shy to be even able to attempt any concealment of this same “painful infirmity,”—for so I regarded it,—my most engrossing thought on such occasions was the successfully hiding and suppressing my mutinous blushes, and which gave me, I felt sure, a very schoolgirl-like demeanour.

“We have all been very anxious to know how you were after your perilous adventure on Sunday evening,” observed Lady Hyacinth, raising her eyebrows, and smiling with a quiet, amused expression that infinitely annoyed me; “I hope you have not felt any ill-effects since? You do not *look* the worse for it, certainly.”

“Oh no, thank you—nothing to speak of,” replied I.

How could I tell these unsympathetic people—that (in heart) mocking young lady, and that cold, fine gentleman sitting opposite, and staring down upon me over his aristocratic nose—that I had for the past two days been experiencing much pain from bruises, which were still under the doctoring care of good Mistress Patterson?

“I am glad you escaped so well,” rejoined the brother; “it would have been an abominably unjust proceeding on the part of Fortune, blind and stupid though she is, if in return for your heroism you had been condemned for life to as crippled a condition as the poor old fellow you saved. Not, I hope, that the danger was as great as you imagined—if any danger at all, in fact—or that after all you need have so ruthlessly sacrificed your fair self in the way you did.”

In their hearts I saw that both brother and sister, so far from regarding what I had done as an act of courageous benevolence, looked upon the whole affair as one of unequalled folly, and of matter only for laughter and amusement.

“Hardly necessary, indeed!” laughed Lady Hyacinth.

I am afraid my answer would not have been as good tempered as courtesy demanded ; but, fortunately, the marquis, foreseeing that mischief was brewing between the ladies, at once interposed by calling his sister's attention—in a slightly admonitory tone—to the beauty of the view, so varied and wide, seen from the window we were near.

I loved the old place—Riversdale Court—I loved every stick and stone in and around the ancient walls ; and it gratified me to hear it admired, especially by those whose taste had been refined and matured by both educational and practical knowledge of the highest kinds.

Seeing that the subject pleased and soothed the irritation excited by Lady Hyacinth's manner, the marquis enlarged on the picturesque topic, principally as connected with the Denzell residence and its surroundings, which he said had been much admired by them all from several points of observation, during their drives and rides. Then by easy digression his scenic remarks flitted abroad, and here he was readily joined by Lady Hyacinth, who now supported the conversation with a warmth

of approval she had not vouchsafed to bestow on my dear old home.

When he chose to take the trouble, the marquis could speak well, even eloquently, in a light, easy style, but without any of that humorous wit which sparkled so gracefully through Charles Beechley's conversation, and which would, had he desired such distinction, have rendered him a dangerous rival among men in the estimation of the majority of women.

Presently the duke came and stood near, and with hands thrust into his trousers pockets stared fixedly at me. He was a tall, big, handsome specimen of an English country gentleman; for, however fatally his morals might have suffered by his long residence abroad, his person had in no degree, it seemed to me, deteriorated from the original stalwart proportions ascribed to him in grandmamma's account of her husband's old friend. His manners and speech, too, had lost nothing of their natural straightforward bluntness.

"You are uncommonly like your beautiful mother, fair lady," he exclaimed, abruptly; "even better looking—do you know that?"

he added, with merciless disregard of my averted eyes and burning cheeks ; “better looking, if that were possible—but I am not sure it is.”

“There is the proof positive that it is not,” rejoined Lady Hyacinth, directing attention to my mother’s picture hanging on the wall behind me.

“What a splendid creature !” said the marquis, rising and approaching the painting ; “the most beautiful woman I ever saw—*one* of the most beautiful, at least,” he added, glancing at me.

“Which do you mean ?” questioned the duke ; “for I vow the only difference *I* perceive is decidedly in favour of the living likeness.”

The son belonged to a more refined school than did the father, duke though that father was. His eyes plainly declared he perfectly coincided in the opinion just expressed, but he did not answer ; his younger and by nature more delicate perceptions saw at once that such flattery was not only unpleasant but offensive to me. The old duke ignored his son’s silent hint, however, for he was one of

that style of elderly gentlemen who think no amount of admiration and praise can be unpalatable to a young lady; and seating himself close beside me, and gazing into my face, exclaimed, warmly,—

“You must come to the old castle, Ennis, and brighten and beautify it by your presence. You don’t mind my calling you Ennis—hey? I am a very old friend of your father’s, you know; and your uncle Denzell and I were like brothers from boyhood,—for that matter, a deuced deal more fond and friendly than the generality of brothers ever are.”

“Oh, no, please call me what you like,” replied I, feeling more discomfited than I had ever done in my life before, under fire of the three pair of eyes noting my every school-girlish expression and movement.

“Hey? what? call you what I like?” he answered, laughing jocosely, and at the same time helping himself to a large pinch of snuff from a handsome French snuff-box, sniffing it up with such gusto that some of the grains flew about, and, betaking themselves to my nose instead of the old duke’s, set me sneezing so vigorously that my three companions laughed heartily.

What an undignified position to be placed in! Nothing I could do would stop the irritation in my nostrils, and, in consequence, equally unable were the aristocratic visitors to restrain their merriment at my expense, and which merriment was the more increased by reason of my increasing discomposure.

I was beyond measure relieved when at that moment the door flew open, and Monica Dormer, fluttering and floating with gay colours, laughing and sparkling, was amidst us and kissing me ere she was conscious who was present. The Riversdales and Dormers were not yet personally acquainted; but the flash of her bright eyes not only told me she quickly recognized the visitors, but also that she was well pleased at this unexpected encounter, especially of the duke and marquis. Two things were the great delight of Monica's heart—flirting and exciting admiration; and the gratification of these amusements was so strong I really think it put aside, almost out of sight, the more serious consideration of matrimony.

“Have you got a cold, dear?” she questioned, with polite interest, as again I sneezed and blew my offended nose.

An irrepressible burst of laughter from father, daughter, and son astonished Monica, who glanced inquiringly at the amused party.

“Oh, no,” I stammered, “I have no cold ; it is only,”—another sneeze.

“It is only that Miss Denzell and I have been taking a pinch of snuff together,” interposed the duke, “and her young, delicate, half-Grecian nose can’t stand the rough treatment my tough old Roman can—that’s all !” laughing noisily.

“Taking snuff ? Why, Ennis ! what in the name of wonder !” But Monica’s keen perception of the ludicrous stopped her with a fit of merriment so joyous, while she looked so pretty and bright, and her mirth, though rather unrestrained and noisy—perhaps for the very reason that it was thoroughly genuine—was, withal, so clear, musical, and infectiously gleeful, that, so it proved, the Riversdales immediately liked her ; yes, and this flash of attractive nature stood her in better stead in at once establishing a friendly acquaintance with these people, worldly and artificial though they were, than months of a laboured politeness might have effected.

Her presence wrought an agreeable change

on all; even my sneezing paroxysm subsided. She and the duke commenced a lively flirtation, the old nobleman skilfully dividing his gallantry — his tongue being employed in Monica's service, his eyes in mine. Often before, but never so much so as now, had I envied pretty Monica's sprightly, self-possessed style of character, which, accommodating itself to every phase of circumstance and to every variety of person, was the brightest sunbeam in the sunshine she created around her. She was, I told her, a very butterfly, finding blossoms wherever she flitted, and amidst which she delighted to besport her gay self, and extract all the honey they contained.

“You seem to have a charming garden, Miss Ennis,” observed the duke, walking to the window and looking down. “Hey! what say you?” turning round to us as he spoke.

Monica, who hated sitting still, warmly seconded the suggestion.

“Oh, yes; it is well worth seeing, I assure you! Ennis delights in her garden, and has some of the loveliest roses in England—or perhaps, for that matter, in the world. One is

my especial admiration," glancing at the marquis; "its leaves are a rich pink edged with green."

"Pink dress and green trimmings!" exclaimed the duke, "by Jupiter that must be splendid! Come on; let us see this wonder, by all means! Why, it must cut *you* out, Ennis—hey?"

Lady Hyacinth and her brother rose, the latter smiling incredulously, and saying,—

"Green edgings? Surely, fair lady, you were under an attack of the green-eyed monster while looking at the flowers."

Monica laughed gaily, "Well, this will prove there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, even in *your* philosophy, most noble Marquis of Belford."

I showed the way, and the whole party, including the duchess and grandmamma, came out on the terrace, and after due admiration bestowed on the transformed moat, which this autumn was more than usually attractive in floral beauties, far advanced though the summer was, we adjourned to the garden. It was no romance of Monica's; the green-tipped rose reigned there in unrivalled loveliness,

queen of the parterre ; a second bloom, almost equal to that which had come, in June, covering it with glory.

Taking out his penknife the marquis cut off a half-open bud, which, together with an exquisite moss rose, he presented to me, saying in a low voice, and fixing his eyes on mine,—

“Perfection to perfection.”

Gently though the words were spoken, Monica, who was before us, heard them, and, turning quickly, said,—

“Which is the loadstone—the dress or the face?”

“There must always be a union of harmony in all connected parts to produce perfection,” he answered, evasively.

“Which was the reason you presented Ennis with some of her own roses. I see,” laughed Monica ; “you thought perfection wanting till that was effected : *I* am more complimentary in my opinion ; I think nothing further requisite.”

She evidently hoped he would continue this lively conversation in the same strain, but he did not, and the talking became general, and was very pleasant ; Monica exercising an at-

tractive power over the whole party, more or less, until they took their departure.

“And now, my Lady Flirt,” said I, “future Marchioness of Belford—future Duchess of Riversdale—I will don my hat and jacket, and walk with you to meet your carriage. I feel that an imperative duty rests upon me to-day to see you safely under the maternal wing.”

“Put them into a good deep glass, dear, plunged up to their green noses in water,” retorted Monica, “and when they are withered—*mark what I say*—pitch them out of the window or into the fire; do not venture to lay up their faded beauty in any box or drawer, for if the marchioness *in prospectu* happens to light on their dead bodies, woe will betide Madam Perfection! That is all *I* have to say.”

CHAPTER X.

VISIT RETURNED.

IN due time grandmamma and I returned the duke's visit. Immensely improved looked the old castle under its present *régime*. Numerous attendants of every kind in the higher grades of servitude, boundless wealth, luxury, and refinement, decorative and enjoyable, reanimated the place, in my eyes, with the restored spirit of the olden times, rendering it, I thought, infinitely preferable to the late neglected, desolate, though perhaps more picturesque, condition it had for so many years presented.

In one of the drawing-rooms the duchess, a large, dark, indolent-looking, handsome woman, was half reclining on a sofa, reading a novel. She had a soft pleasant expression of countenance, and I felt immediately attracted by that

and her foreign style of beauty—merely foreign in *style*, for she was of English descent.

The two girls, Hyacinth and Frances, were playing a duet on the piano in an adjoining music-room.

“Go to them, dear, and let them see you are come,” she said, good-humouredly, when greetings were over; and away I went as directed.

They both received me very cordially, and, presenting their pretty cheeks to be kissed in French fashion, accompanied me back to their mother.

“They were delighted with Miss Dormer,” Lady Hyacinth said; “her manners were perfect. They were really quite surprised to meet with anything in Riversdale so—so—” Her young ladyship stopped, evidently puzzled in what fashion to word the family opinion without perhaps giving offence, not only to me, but to the whole county of mammas and daughters, should it become generally known.

“Not Reggie or papa, Cinth?” interposed Lady Frances, in a surprised, questioning voice. “They hardly spoke of *her*, if you remember? You and I were warm in her

praise, and mamma admired her a good deal, saying her manners were in quite the best Parisian style; but papa and Reggie declared she did not bear speaking of in comparison with—with others they knew; and—”

“Oh, but you are perfectly correct in your opinion of Monica Dormer,” I interrupted, addressing Lady Hyacinth in particular. “She was three years at one of the first finishing-schools in Paris, and has on various occasions been a good deal abroad with members of her family.”

“Monica!” repeated Lady Frances, “that is a funny name—pretty, too—and singularly appropriate to Miss Dormer. I never heard it before.”

“Well, I don’t know that I like it,” rejoined her sister, disparagingly. “It is a funny name, as you say, and that makes it objectionable, to begin with; and then it does not admit of being nicely shortened. Monny! what an ugly abbreviation!”

Lady Frances and I laughed.

“Yes,” said I; “there is ‘Nica,’ which sounds pretty enough. But the name of ‘Monica’ I like very much: it is both pretty

and quaint, as your sister says, and admirably suitable to the owner."

"*I* do not admire it at all," objected Lady Hyacinth, decisively.

"Perhaps," I said, "it is rather too simple to properly suit so elegant and accomplished a girl as Monica Dormer; but—"

"Is she accomplished?" interposed Lady Hyacinth, dubiously.

"She is considered so," replied I, feeling greatly amused, as the thought, suggested by her words, passed through my mind. "Can any accomplished girl come out of Riversdale or its neighbourhood?"

"I think you will not find that country girls, among the higher classes, are such Goths as you imagine," I added, answering her unspoken opinion.

"No; we have certainly not found them so as yet," replied Lady Frances, smiling kindly.

"We know so few as yet," rejoined Lady Hyacinth, sententiously.

"Quite enough to open our eyes to a thing or two they have not seen before," laughed her sister.

I wondered what, or to whom, the "thing

or two" referred; but, not liking to ask, remained silent, hoping Lady Cinthia would question.

She did not; she proceeded to make sundry inquiries concerning the Dormer family and others possessing properties in the county of Elderborough and neighbouring shires. The Ladies Riphon were, as I have said, both pretty, but it was a beauty resulting more from effect than actual good looks.

Their figures were well formed, above the middle height, elegant, and graceful. Lady Hyacinth had dark hair,—her sister fair; and light and dark were equally glossy and thick. Beyond these resemblances the two girls were totally dissimilar, especially in expression and manner.

Lady Frances, though endowed with her mother's style of feature, was the most unlike her of all the children. She had the same beaming, good-humoured expression of eye; clear, pale skin; rather large, smiling mouth; and regular, white teeth. Now from which member of her family Lady Cinthia inherited this latter feature I know not; for, as regarded her parents, its possession was exclusively her own,

being thin lipped and satirical in its habitual expression, especially when smiling. Nevertheless it was a small, pretty mouth; and her eyes were bright, and of a rich dark blue, that contrasted favourably with her dark hair. Her teeth too were small, and of a pearly prettiness. But the little nose! The most perfect *nez retroussé* I had ever seen; and so skilful an abettor in every movement of the scornful little mouth that, had either been unsupported by the other, it would have seemed deprived of half its power and effect. I feel sure it would. Presently she proceeded to catechize me in a supercilious fashion as to the most desirable and visitable portion of the county society near and far; and not a little aggravating and chafing me the while by a running fire of commentaries upon my answers. These she kept up in a half-ironical manner, smiling down upon me with the patronizing air of an experienced woman of the world—which in truth she was—amused by the unsophisticated ideas of a raw country girl. Now my quick-tempered feelings are not of a kind to long patiently submit to this species of treatment. I became restive and irritably rebellious under its infliction—a state

of things which I could see—and was the more aggravated in consequence—yet further increased Hyacinth's enjoyment at my cost.

How this intercourse might have terminated I cannot say; but, in all probability, had it continued longer, in a fashion that would have rather startled my polished inquisitor, and have brought the conversation to a rather more abrupt close than she would have quite liked.

Lady Frances, who from the first had seemed annoyed, came to the rescue just as I was on the point of indignantly declaring that, as I could plainly see it was more amusement than information Lady Hyacinth sought, I would not gratify her further in either way.

“The view from this window is so beautiful! do come and look at it, Miss Denzell.” And, thankful to escape before my rapidly heating temper had boiled over, I immediately rose and accompanied Lady Frances to the end of the room.

The elder sister angered and depressed me; but the younger, on the contrary, cheered me. My heart at once warmed to her sunny smile, languidly gentle manner, and unassuming conversation; all which the style of her life and

education seemed but to have improved, as one often sees in grounds whose cultivation and adornment are so skilfully managed it is impossible to detect where nature ends and art begins. Artificial she was, of course; how could it be otherwise? In their different ways both sisters were as much so as foreign governesses and teachers, foreign society, foreign habits, ideas, and ways of every kind, could possibly render them.

And yet how unlike they really were! How curiously the different nature in each struggled to re-assert its power over them, and with what marvellous success too! In Lady Hyacinth's case it would have been better, perhaps, had nature failed—so I thought at least—but the combination was charming in her sister.

From that day a friendship commenced between Frances and me, which neither time nor circumstances have destroyed; indeed they have but strengthened it.

For a while we stood chatting and laughing at the window, oblivious, on my part, of the existence of the disagreeable elder sister. Presently the duchess called me to her and made me sit beside her, and fixed her large, sleepy,

handsome eyes on my face, which reddened awkwardly under this merciless scrutiny.

Laughing good-humouredly, and stroking my hot cheek with her soft finger, she talked to me of my garden, my flowers, and various pursuits, adapting her conversation, as she thought, to my age and capacities, and concluding with remarks on the singular resemblance I bore to my mother, whom she had known before her marriage with Sir William Denzell.

“I have not seen your youngest daughter,” observed grandmamma, the thought no doubt suggested by these comments on myself; “is she like you, or like either of her sisters?”

I looked at the duchess, and was amazed and almost startled by the change that had come over her countenance and manner at this simple inquiry.

Her brow contracted as from some spasm of sharp, scarce-endurable pain; the colour rushed tumultuously over her face, then as suddenly died away, leaving her so pale I feared she was going to faint.

“No, no,” she stammered, “they are not at all alike;” and hurriedly, and in a tone that sounded considerably more like a soul-felt

thanksgiving than the unimportant answer it seemed, "oh, no! there is not the slightest resemblance between them."

Lady Hyacinth murmured a few words. I could not distinguish their import, but the voice, look, and manner with which they were uttered, were strangely full of an irrepressible disgust and impatience.

I glanced questioningly—I could not help it—at Lady Frances, who in reply rose and walked to the door, saying, gently,—

"Will you come with me, Miss Denzell?"

"You know Miss Denzell to be more than commonly endowed with courage and nerve, or you would hardly be thus confidential so early in your acquaintance, Fanny," observed Lady Hyacinth.

"Miss Denzell is as largely blessed with good sense and good feeling as with firmness and courage," replied Lady Fanny; "and I am not at all afraid of trusting her."

"Comme vous voulez, ma chère," answered the other, carelessly turning away.

I wondered immensely, while following Lady Frances, what it all meant—who or what I was going to see.

Passing across the spacious hall, we ascended a broad staircase, three parts encircling the first. Every portion of the building—the principal portion at least—abounded in paintings, statues, busts, &c., all available nooks, corners, and walls being filled and covered with something ornamental. But, indeed, Riversdale Court was adorned, as far as it admitted, in much the same fashion.

Along divers handsome corridors, through passages, and up another staircase, and we reached a broad landing, where Lady Frances stopped, and, laying her hand on my arm, said gravely,—

“Young and inexperienced though you are, Ennis—may I call you by that pretty name?”

“Oh, yes! I should like it. But, Lady Frances, inexperienced I may be, but not much younger than yourself, I am sure.”

“Some four or five years: you are sixteen or seventeen, are you not? and I am more than one-and-twenty.”

“And I am rather more than seventeen, and—”

“Yes; and remember I am twice as old for my age, as you are for yours,” interposed Lady

Fanny ; adding, “ but if I call you Ennis, you likewise must call me only Frances.”

“ I will ; that is such a pretty name, too.”

“ It is rather. Well, as I was saying, inexperienced though you naturally are at your age, you must nevertheless have often heard that term—now the fashion to bestow on any mysterious domestic trouble—the skeleton in the closet ? ”

“ Yes ; repeatedly.”

“ Just such an affliction dwells with us ; we too are haunted by a skeleton in the closet,” continued my companion.

“ Are you ? ” exclaimed I, astonished—
“ you, who seem so far removed from all troubles of every kind ! ”

Lady Frances sighed.

“ Ye-s—it does seem so. Well,” she added, after a pause, “ it is to this unhappy household spectre I now propose introducing you.”

Notwithstanding my reputed nerve and courage, I must confess this unlooked-for confidence rather daunted me, fully expecting the shut-up skeleton would prove to be a little frightful idiot child. I did not answer at the moment, and Frances said,—

“The fact is, Ennis, I have taken a great fancy to you—more so than to any girl I have yet known. Possibly I have not met one of your stamp before; certainly never one of your sweet, heart-winning beauty. Be that as it may, however, I was charmed with you at once; charmed with you when on Sunday evening you rushed into the road to save old Dumps.”

“Dubbs,” I corrected, laughing.

“I could not have done such a thing myself,” she resumed, laughing also: “naturally one takes most care of that which one values most, and I honestly confess I entertain too warm a regard for my life to risk the losing it for any old gentleman in England, excepting papa. But I admired and liked you all the better for so bravely forgetting yourself, dear Ennis”; and she put her arm round me and affectionately kissed my cheek—a soft, pretty caress, which, girl-fashion, I impulsively responded to. “It is because of this liking I am resolved to make you acquainted with our one great, at least our greatest, household sorrow. I have heard that already many rumours, absurd

as they are exaggerated, are floating over the neighbourhood regarding the matter, and which increases my anxiety that you should see and know the exact truth for yourself. Belford particularly wishes you to be told," added Lady Frances, in a marked tone, and with the air of one who, in so saying, considers she has paid the highest compliment she can bestow upon her listener.

I could not help feeling amused at the family importance evidently attached to the opinions of the son and heir.

"How much you must wonder what it is I am going to show you!" she resumed, again moving on; "and how surprised when I tell you it is my little sister—my poor little sister Gurty! That does not sound very formidable, does it?"

"A little girl!" replied I. "No, indeed."

Lady Frances again sighed audibly. Presently she opened a red-baize door, within which was a short passage conducting to another covered door; and we entered a large, comfortably, even handsomely, furnished sitting-room. It formed one of a suite of four apartments, all opening into each other. The

two nearest to the drawing-room were bedrooms; the fourth a bath-room, &c.

Beside a centre table was seated a tall, middle-aged, amiable-looking woman, working; and opposite to her sat a child of apparently ten or eleven years of age. That she was a child—a human being, in fact—was only shown by her figure, which was fairly tall for her age, well formed, but very slender, and her hands delicate and white almost to transparency. But her head and face, and even part of her throat! Good gracious! Never shall I forget the feeling of horror, of positive terror, I experienced at sight of that strange, dreadful little creature. So great was the shock I shrank back, grasping my companion by the arm, exclaiming,—

“Oh, Frances, what is that? what is that?”

“Do not be frightened, dear. I am very sorry. It was stupidly inconsiderate of me not to have explained a little more beforehand,” stammered Lady Frances, hurriedly; “but having myself been so long accustomed to her appearance—since she was born, you know—the idea did not occur to me that a stranger—” Then suddenly lowering her

voice to an anxious murmur, "There is nothing to fear, dear Ennis. She is the gentlest, sweetest-natured little creature you can imagine. Try and control yourself, for, poor child, she may perhaps understand your feeling of abhorrence, and be distressed—painfully distressed; who knows?"

Thus petitioned, I took a chair placed for me by the attendant, involuntarily pushing it further from the object of my terror, and feeling half dazed by an overpowering sensation of faintness I could scarcely overcome.

Frightened and distressed at sight of my blanched cheeks, Lady Frances ran to the adjoining room and brought me a tumbler of water, which quickly restored my senses. She then urged me to at once come away; but, ashamed of my foolish weakness, I positively refused, declaring I was now quite well, and preferred remaining.

"Well, Gurty, how are you and the world getting on together, as Dr. Carlinez says?" questioned Frances, in a kind, cheerful voice, going round as she spoke, and—yes, oh, how could she do it! yes—actually bending and kissing the little monster, who, from the

moment we entered the room, had not ceased staring and blinking her small animal eyes at me. I longed to hear her speak, and listened breathlessly for the answer. It came.

“Who is she, Frances? Who is she—that beautiful creature? Is she my sister too?”

My goodness, what a voice! What an unnatural, extraordinary voice! Deep-toned, like that of an old man; to the last degree mournful, without the faintest ring of girlishness in it, and, but in the mere articulation of the words, nothing even human; the voice like the face.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PHENOMENON.

SOME months previous to the birth of her youngest daughter, Lady Guernsey Riphon, the Duchess of Riversdale, with her family, was spending the autumn months in a charming house near Geneva. About this time a wild-beast show, remarkable for its magnificent collection of animals, was exhibiting in many principal foreign towns, and was now in Geneva. Among other curiosities were some rare species of the monkey tribe—chimpanzee, orang-outang, &c.—the largest and most frightfully man-like yet seen.

Late one sultry evening the duchess sat alone in her bed-room, at a short distance from the open window, dozing in an easy-chair. A sound, not particularly loud, but so

strange that it vibrated through every sleeping nerve in her body, awoke her, and she looked up—at first with dreamy, half-awake glance, then with a convulsive start, and wide, wild stare; the next instant, uttering a scream so fearfully agonized it pierced the remotest corner of the house, she sank back insensible.

Speedily the room was crowded with her family and servants, who came rushing from every part of the building; but so long a period elapsed ere the almost scared away life of the poor lady could be recalled that messengers were despatched in all directions to bring every available doctor to their assistance. For days and nights the brain continued too confused to allow of her giving any coherent account of the reason for this sudden and frightful seizure; but report, together with a now and then broken, shuddering sentence of the patient's, soon helped to enlighten her distressed family.

A huge orang-outang had, on the day of the evening in question, escaped from the menagerie, and been found and recaptured in the close neighbourhood of the duke's resi-

dence—in the very grounds, in fact—and, no doubt by means of a tree growing near the window, the really gentle, harmless creature had ascended and gratified its monkey curiosity by gazing in upon the sleeping lady, and nearly frightening her to death or irrecoverable madness. So great was the shock to her nervous system that although immediately removed from the scene of her terrible adventure, and as soon as possible made to partake of quiet amusements in Paris and elsewhere, her mind did not recover its true tone until the birth of a child four months afterwards, and during which four months the afflicted mother had not been able, night or day, to withhold her thoughts from dwelling on that appalling vision.

Alas for the unhappy infant!

In diabolical (I can call it by no milder term), diabolical perfection, the head and face of the orang-outang were daguerreotyped on the wretched little body; not a trace of humanity did they—the head and face—present to the eyes of the positively terrified doctor and attendants, beyond that possessed by the baboon species. So horribly frightful

was it that at the moment of its birth the appalling question pended between the father and physician whether or not so unnatural “a thing” ought to be allowed to live. The well-formed human body, from the throat downwards, pleaded in its favour, however, and the little afflicted creature was spared, but of course only under the mitigated penalty of imprisonment for life.

The duchess was strictly prohibited from seeing her child. A nurse—the excellent woman I before mentioned—was engaged, at a high salary, to take charge of it; and four months after, upon the Riversdale family visiting the Channel Islands, the name of Guernsey was, by the nurse and a certain Dr. Carlinez, conferred upon the unacknowledged baby—Lady Guernsey Riphon! Oh, the mockery of that title!

This account I subsequently received from Frances, who thus concluded, in a mingled tone of inquiry, doubt, and perplexity,—

“And oh, Ennis (if such things are), it really seemed as if the direful affliction was sent upon poor mamma as an especial punishment because of those contemptuous, proud

feelings she entertained towards the lower classes."

"Does she?" said I, in surprise. "Why, the duchess appears to me so peculiarly amiable and kind hearted."

"So she is—no one can be more so; nevertheless, to such an extent did mamma carry her belief in the difference of nature between the higher and lower orders that it was impossible to persuade her, even on points of health, that she was liable to any of the like infirmities the poor people are. That very morning—the morning of the fatal evening—she had declared it her intention to some day inspect the wild-beast show, and was exceedingly indignant with her maid Pearson for presuming to suggest such a *vulgar* possibility as that any injury might thereby accrue to *her* unborn child! Just as if she were a farmer's or tradesman's wife!"

"Has her sorrow changed her?" I asked.

"To a certain extent, yes; but poor mamma has never been the same thing since that terrible day. I mean (do not repeat this, dear)—I mean her *mind* has never quite recovered its balance; or rather yes, it has

done that—she is perfectly rational and sensible, —but any excitement causes a perceptible difference in the expression of her eye, and her words and manner become immediately confused. This soon passes off, of course; but it should not be. By this time she ought, Dr. Carlinez said, to have perfectly recovered from such attacks, and her present state keeps us all very anxious.”

But now I must resume the account of my first interview with poor Gurty.

“No, she is not your sister; you have only two sisters, you know—Hyacinth and me,” answered Lady Frances.

“Hyacinth is not my sister,” replied the child, “she said so; and I don’t want her to be.”

“No; you have me, and that is enough, is it not?” and Frances laid her hand tenderly on the hideous head, which was disproportionately large for the slender body.

A wondrously soft, fond expression came into the melancholy baboon face; but she merely said, still looking steadfastly at me,—

“Is she going to stay with me? I shall

like her; there is room in my bed for her."

Frances glanced at my horrified countenance. After a quiet, languid fashion she was of a lively disposition, and this generous arrangement so stirred her mirth she burst into a violent fit of laughter, and was obliged to sit down.

With little, solemn, wondering eyes, and constant lifting of the eyebrows, as is the habit of monkeys, Gurty watched her sister. Not the faintest semblance of a smile crossed her own features—their ugliness would have been utterly unendurable if it had—neither were they darkened by any expression of anger.

Could that face smile? I mentally questioned; if she attempted anything of the kind, would it not be a chattering grin after the manner of the orang-outang? Oh, but I hope and trust she will not! Should she do so, I am convinced it will send me flying from the room, for the dreadful head and countenance are of themselves almost more than I can bear.

"Are you fond of reading?" I asked, trying to speak composedly, and taking a book from the table.

"I never get anything I like," she replied,

in a despondent but not a complaining tone.

“Oh, but how is that, Gurty?” rejoined Frances, looking inquiringly at nurse Prosser. “I thought you were supplied with an unlimited number of books of all sorts from Mudie’s?—full of pictures, too.”

“La! yes, Lady Frances, so she is,” answered Prosser, quietly and firmly; “more by a great deal than she cares to read, poor dear. You see there are but few she can at all understand.”

The little lady did not answer, and looked so unconsciously indifferent to both her sister’s surprised question and Prosser’s opinion that I was more than half inclined to believe she did not comprehend either. And yet she perfectly understood me; then why not the others?

“Show the young lady your drawings, dear,” suggested nurse, anxious, I could see, to distract that fixed regard from myself which, notwithstanding my endeavour to overcome the feeling, so greatly disconcerted me.

“I should like to put her in a picture, nurse,” murmured the low, unnatural voice—not so unpleasant a voice either, though so strange;

it was intensely mournful, which at times imparted a certain melody to its tone, reminding me of a muffled funeral bell.

“Yes, and so perhaps, some day—who knows how soon?—you will, dear,” rejoined the kind-hearted woman, in quick sympathy with the poor little prisoner’s longing for a greater enjoyment of one of the few pleasures open to her. “I have no doubt this young lady, who looks as amiable as she is pretty, will come and see you again, on purpose to let you sketch her.”

I could not venture to commit myself by any promise, not knowing as yet what it might involve,—perhaps the being left alone with her, which would have frightened me out of my wits; but I took courage and smiled a silent answer to the long, lugubrious visage still scrutinizing my features with as much imperturbable coolness as if I were a marble statue brought there to be stared at.

“But there, go and fetch your drawings, Lady Gurty, and show them to Miss Denzell,” urged nurse Prosser: “she has not a notion how clever you are with your pencil and paint. I would bring them, but am not sure—though

you never said so, poor dear—that you like your drawing-things touched by any one but yourself.”

She rose obediently, and walked to a window, within the wide recess of which stood a long table covered with drawing materials and books, and brought from thence a portfolio, and placed it opposite to me, and again sat down.

Her movements were slow and listless. She was slow in everything, but not ungraceful; and I thought, while watching her, what thousands of pounds would low-born, mercenary parents realize by the public exhibition of such a phenomenon.

Her head, baboon shaped and long, was covered with thick, short, coarse animal hair that grew close down behind and on either side to the conjunction between the first and the white, slender throat, but leaving bare a space round the huge orang-outang ear, that was set far back and high. Oh, words would be powerless to describe the horrible combination of the human and brute animal which the half-maddened brain of the mother had helped to produce in the person of this poor child!

“ You have more to do than that, Gurty,” said Lady Frances, gently, and moving the portfolio towards her. “ You must select the painting you consider best done, and give it to Miss Denzell to pass judgment.”

Gurty said nothing, but opened the book as directed, found something that satisfied her, having rejected several others, then sat abstractedly gazing at it.

Lady Frances bent forward and looked.

“ That is very pretty—as well drawn as anything you have, I think; do not you?”

“ Ye-s,” replied the sad voice. Presently remembering, she suddenly raised her solemn little eyes to mine, and slowly pushed the drawing across the table to me.

Considerably more perplexed was I what place to assign this strange creature in the scale of humanity at sight of the painting she had so judiciously selected.

It was, under the circumstances, wonderfully beautiful!—sketched with the perfection of correctness—the colouring soft, clear, and natural; a picture, in fact, the most highly accomplished girl might justly have felt proud of. For myself, I know, it far, far exceeded in

artistic skill anything of the kind I could produce with the greatest pains.

"How pretty! how beautifully done!" were my involuntary exclamations; "done with so much taste—so much talent!"

"There, Gurty," said her sister, in a pleased, encouraging tone, "are you not flattered? And oh! what an exquisite drawing of Miss Denzell you will make, after that!—will you not, dear?"

"Yes," replied Gurty, her face and manner expressing neither pride nor pleasure at my praise, but a stolid indifference so unnatural under the circumstances that I felt more than ever persuaded she only partially, or in some misty way, understood the full meaning of anything.

"May I have her to-morrow, Frances?" she added, abruptly, and this time with an expression of interest really pleasant to see.

"I do not know; perhaps it may not be convenient to Miss Denzell to come again so soon; but I dare say in a very few days she will kindly oblige you."

Gurty did not answer, but the sort of awakening look which had faintly lit up her

soulless features suddenly died out, leaving them comparatively sadder than before.

I could not bear to see that expression in one already so afflicted, knowing, too, it was in my power to lessen, if not remove, it; whereupon I said, cheerfully,—

“Look here, Gurty; suppose I decide to come the day after to-morrow—Friday, you know—will that suit you?”

“Oh, that will be very kind of you, dear Ennis,” interposed Lady Frances, gratefully, “very kind; will it not, Gurty?”

The latter had fixed her eyes upon me when I spoke, lifting her projecting brows up and down in frightful monkey fashion, and presently said,—

“You will not cheat poor Gurty; you will be sure and come?”

“Do you think Miss Denzell looks like a person who could or would cheat any one, Gurty?” asked her sister, smiling.

“She is beautiful. I want to have her always with me in my book,” tolled the mournful voice, ignoring as usual the direct question.

“Nothing shall prevent my coming, dear, if

possible," I promised; then proceeded to examine the contents of the portfolio.

"So you must set to work, little woman," rejoined Frances, "and have everything prepared—cardboard, pencils, paints, and so on, you know—not to keep your visitor waiting. Don't forget."

She remained silent, but a look of greater intelligence once more brightened her countenance.

Every picture I examined astonished me more and more. One in particular was charmingly executed. It was the old, used-up subject of a shoeless, stockingless girl and pitcher at the village well; but in all there was an unmistakable evidence of talent, which it was plain to see had been skilfully developed by cultivation.

"You have been well taught, Gurty," I observed. "Who was your teacher?"

She surprised me by the directness of her answer,—

"Dr. Carlinez."

I glanced inquiringly at Lady Fanny, who immediately rose, saying,—

"Well, then, it is quite settled, my lady artist,

that Miss Denzell gives you her first sitting on Friday ; so take care and have all ready for the momentous undertaking. Remember, we shall, every one, criticize it strictly. And now good-bye, dear” ; and Frances laid her soft white hand tenderly on the brown, receding, wrinkled forehead.

Wishing her little ladyship adieu, to which she made no response, but steadfastly watched me with blinking eyes, as I quitted the room, I accompanied Lady Frances, who hurried through divers passages in a different direction to that we had come. We were both silent, my thoughts running on the promised interview with the poor monster child, and secretly resolved that before entering upon the business I would stipulate with Frances that not for one minute was I to be left alone with her. The bare thought that she might catch hold of and, in monkey mischievousness try and do me a hurt made my blood feel suddenly cold in my veins.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONVERSATION.

PRESENTLY she stopped, and, opening a door, introduced me to her bed-room. What a charmingly luxurious affair it was! Mine, comfortable and luxurious too in its way, was nothing to it.

“People must have been brought to a standstill at last where to discover another requirement or luxury in this room,” said I, looking about with wondering admiration. The walls were bright with fine and attractive paintings, which harmonized well with the beautiful view commanded from two large high windows; while every kind of rich furniture, which would not have disgraced the royal chamber, covered the floor and filled the nooks and corners.

“I am glad you think it pretty,” replied

Lady Frances, smiling; "but some day you must let me show you Hyacinth's, and then mine will sink in your estimation as would a square pianoforte in contrast to a magnificent grand."

"Would that be possible?"

"Quite. Her bed-room opens into a boudoir; both apartments are large and extravagantly adorned with exquisite specimens of foreign art, which she collected during our many rambles and long residence abroad. But now we must have some tea," she interrupted, ringing the bell; "they are certain to be consoling themselves in that way in the drawing-room, and you and I will do the same here, and meanwhile enjoy a little cosy chat."

"Oh, yes; this is delightful!" exclaimed I, as we seated ourselves on a downy couch near an open window. "It will be far pleasanter having tea in this charming room than in that—in the drawing-room."

Thoughts of the proud, supercilious Lady Hyacinth crossed my mind and nearly drove me into committing the rudeness of saying, "That *stiff* drawing-room."

At that instant Lady Fanny's maid, Nar-

nette, appeared. She was a pretty, coquettish-looking little grisette, whose thoroughly French black eyes flashed over the stranger lady with a rapidity and, I could see, an instant comprehension of every—the minutest point about her, peculiar to that quick-witted class of a quick-witted people.

She received her tea order in French of a much purer accent than her own, displayed a set of white teeth in a piquant pleasure-loving smile, and vanished.

“I hope, dear Ennis, you have forgiven my taking you without considerate preparation into the presence of that poor child—creature—oh, I know not what to call her; for, horribly incredible as it is, the nature of the chimpanzee or orang-outang is so largely blended with the human in her character—sometimes more so, sometimes less—that I am ever at a loss, a painful bewildering loss, in what light to justly regard her, either in point of humanity or—yes, or relationship.”

“Oh, please forget my foolish nervousness, and do not speak of it again,” I cried: “it soon passed, and then I was heartily ashamed of myself; and—”

“ You had no reason to be ashamed, dear,” she interposed, “ your surprise and fear were perfectly natural ; the fault was mine that you experienced them, not your own ; but, having long outlived all sensations of the kind myself, I totally forgot the effect her appearance might make on a stranger. Indeed — you will wonder at me I know,” added Lady Frances, blushing very prettily, and looking down, “ but, so far from fear or dislike, I possess an indefinable feeling of—yes, of *love* for this poor afflicted little prisoner ; and it is matter of sorrow to me that no other member of my family regards her but with dread and abhorrence. Mamma has seen her but once since her ill-starred birth ; and so terrified was she at the sight, that Dr. Carlinez, the great Paris psychological physician, prohibited her venturing again ; and she never has.”

“ Oh, I like you so much for your tender compassion for the poor thing,” said I, warmly. “ I *do* wonder at the love you express for her ; but that only proves the more to me what an amiable, noble nature you are blessed with.”

“ I don’t know,” replied Lady Frances, turning away her head and looking out of the

window, "I don't know, Ennis—wait till we are better acquainted—till—till—but to go on with what I was saying," she interposed, in quicker tones, "Dr. Carlinez attended mamma after her dreadful shock, until her confinement; we came to Paris on purpose to be near him; and when we subsequently visited Jersey and Guernsey, he several times ran over to see her and the poor baby during our stay. At the age of five years Gurty was, at Dr. Carlinez's request, placed in his Hospice des Aliénés, some miles out of Paris, and there left under his and nurse Prosser's care during our absence in Italy."

"I conclude you always kept her entirely out of people's sight then, as you do now?" I questioned.

"Oh dear, yes! our every movement would have been mobbed if we had not; and our house too, for that matter. Dr. Carlinez was eagerly anxious to try whether it were possible that, by skilful training of certain kinds, and developing of her intellect, the animal form of her face and head might not be so far softened down and humanized as to become less hideously remarkable, if nothing better."

“And has it done so, do you think?” questioned I, wondering, if it had, what she was like before.

Frances shook her head.

“Your feeling upon first seeing her is a strong, unmistakable answer to that, Emmis.”

“She can read,” I urged, “and draws beautifully, wonderfully ; her mind, therefore, must be far less defective than her face. Reading especially, you know, is a purely human acquirement, and so are the taste and the skill which are shown in her paintings.”

“Ye-s, that is true,” replied Lady Frances, thoughtfully.

Nannette and tea arrived at this juncture, and for a while our conversation ran on other subjects.

“Gurty seems of a particularly amiable, contented disposition,” I resumed, presently, as we sipped our tea and crunched delicate wafer biscuits,—manufactured at a famous confectioner’s in Paris, Frances told me, in answer to my expressed admiration of the same.

“Oh, yes, she is that, poor little creature ; and, as regards her happiness, it is a blessing

for her she is. Were she of a restless, dissatisfied nature, life would be intolerable to her."

"The duchess seems also possessed of a sweet, equable temper," I rejoined; "and it must, therefore, be from her mother she inherits this pleasant side of her character."

"No, no," answered Lady Frances, hesitating and looking down, and playing with her teaspoon; "no. I wish it were so; I wish to my heart it were a family heritage, but such is not the case. Mamma, though usually of a placid, cheerful disposition, is readily open to annoyance of any kind; she is easily ruffled and dispirited; and this, papa told us, was always her style of temper; and though no doubt the frightful shock her brain received helped to aggravate these infirmities, their origin had no connexion with it. Papa, too, is passionate, though kind and good natured."

A something in my companion's manner excited my curiosity too keenly to be restrained.

"Then from what source does she derive her gentle, yielding nature?" I asked, in a low voice.

Lady Frances was silent for a few seconds.

Presently, but without seeming to immediately answer my question, she said,—

“Gurty was left more than three years with Mrs. Prosser, under Dr. Carlinez’s care, while we travelled about for the better restoration of mamma’s health. The noble-hearted doctor was wildly anxious and curious regarding Gurty. ‘Never in his life before,’ he said, ‘had he met so singular, so inexplicable a natural combination of the horrible and yet interesting in a human being.’ Mrs. Prosser, at my request, wrote constantly to me, and her accounts were unvarying of the kindness and attention of Dr. Carlinez. I knew he felt a keen scientific interest in the case; and nurse said he spared neither time nor trouble to dive into the mysteries of her character—the peculiarities of her nature, its tendencies, tempers, and intellectual capabilities, and to how great an extent the latter prevailed over mere instinct, and on what points.”

“And did he ever inform you freely of the result of these investigations?” I asked eagerly, as Frances paused.

“Oh, yes; he told me everything,” she answered, rather abstractedly.

“Well, and what was it, Frances? for I confess to feeling quite as keen an interest in the case as I am sure Dr. Carlinez ever did.”

“All he could discover,” she replied, smiling, “was that the human and the brute natures are so closely interwoven both in brain and heart, they are never entirely separated. If for an instant a flash of intellect brightens, the next, animal nature dulls and confuses; while just as often the former briefly, curiously, steps in and lights up the mental darkness of the latter.”

“Yes,” said I, “I noticed that the whole time. Oh, it was very curious!—just like lights and shades passing over a landscape.”

“Exactly. About this time, to Dr. Carlinez’s great satisfaction, his study of the case was immensely facilitated by the arrival in Paris of the same menagerie of animals containing the very monkey that had wrought us such an irretrievable amount of woe. Day after day the worthy doctor visited this dreadful beast, spending hours in its company, and questioning the keepers concerning its habits, temper, and intelligence, human and brute. Oh, Ennis,

fancy comparing notes between such a monster as that and my poor little sister, Lady Guernsey Riphon, youngest daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Riversdale, whose birth was of course duly installed in its proper place in Burke's perpetuating pages! Is it not horrible, Ennis?"

It was horrible! too horrible! I could not contradict her, and remained silent.

"The effect of her appearance upon you this afternoon convinces me more than ever how horrible a case it is," continued Lady Fanny, thoughtfully. "What a mockery all gaiety, grandeur, and show seem to me when the thought of this awful skeleton in our closet flashes through my mind; when I think that if the poor harmless little creature were to suddenly make her appearance amongst an assembly of our friends they would one and all—even the gallant knights, I suspect—rush from the room, if not the house, and never return while they believed she was in it; yes, though they knew her to be the daughter of the family!"

"I suppose she can never walk out?" said I, breaking a silence of some minutes.

“Oh, yes; but only in a small garden enclosed within a high wall for her express use, and down to which a flight of steps descends from one of her rooms.”

“Every possible means of making her happy and comfortable seems to have been attended to,” I observed.

“Dr. Carlinez, one of the noblest-souled—in my opinion *the* noblest-souled man in the world, was the suggestor, promoter, and gentle-hearted arranger of all,” replied Lady Frances, with a warmth of grateful feeling that caused her cheeks to burn and her eyes to sparkle.

“The servants are told that the youngest daughter is an unfortunate idiot—some explanation is obliged, of course, to be given, and papa considered that the most likely to be satisfactory—that she is an idiot, to whom the sight of strangers is so hateful, their presence immediately arouses in her paroxysms of passion dangerous both to them and herself. Poor gentle Gurty! Ah me, Ennis! that yielding gentleness which we were speaking about is one of her most revolting points. It is exactly the nature, Dr. Carlinez ascer-

tained, of that dreadful caricature of humanity, the orang-outang !”

“ Would it not have been better to leave her altogether under her nurse’s and Dr. Carlinez’s care in France ? ” I asked, presently.

“ Papa was extremely desirous of doing so, but the doctor would not longer undertake the responsibility, and refused to keep her upon our return to England. ‘ He feared,’ he said, ‘ notwithstanding all his guardedness, that the poor child might be seen and kidnapped away ’ ; adding, ‘ in the hands of unprincipled wretches she would be of priceless value, and nothing will induce me to retain her longer.’ Entirely on Gurty’s account we came to Riversdale Castle. It is more secluded than our other places ; and Dr. Carlinez says the time is not far distant when she will be safe beyond human power to harm her. Until then mamma wished to remain here.”

“ What does he mean ?—that she will not live long ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Frances, gently ; then presently continued, “ when in England papa received a letter from the doctor, in which he said that his motive for so suddenly refusing

to keep Lady Guernsey—but which motive he deemed it best for certain reasons not then to mention—was the having had a letter offering him 10,000*l.* down for the person of the—as the writer expressed it—‘monster child’ then in his possession, and a promise of 5,000*l.* additional in six years. This letter bore the signature of the owner of the wild-beast show so much favoured by Dr. Carlinez at the period of its stay in Paris two years before. Considering it the most prudent course to pursue, the good doctor concealed his honest disgust and indignation, and wrote a polite answer, thanking Monsieur de Veau for his liberal proposal, but, alas ! it had come too late for either to benefit by it. The poor little ‘monster’ was dead : died, some months back, quite suddenly, of inflammation of the lungs. This announcement the wild-beast man received in perfect faith ; for that any human being could be found possessed of such reckless disregard of his pecuniary interests as to refuse from motives of honour such a positive fortune was to his money-loving, money-making mind a simple impossibility.”

A long silence ensued. My thoughts were in

a whirl of confusion between all I had seen and all I had heard. How little did I guess, when coming to this great castle, whose owners I believed so enviable, so far removed from aught that needed concealment, that within this very household lay immured for life a more appalling skeleton than was ever conceived in the most frightful nightmare!

“What idea has she of religion?” I asked, abruptly. “That would be the best of all means whereby to test her mental capability.”

“What would?” replied Lady Frances, evasively I thought, for the colour came into her cheeks, and her voice altered.

“Religion,” I said, firmly—more firmly to this member of the reputedly godless family than Mr. Charley would have credited me. “Do you not think that if her mind is capable of receiving and understanding the principles of revealed religion, that would be a clear proof the intellectual powers must be in the ascendant?”

“Perhaps so,—very possibly. I really do not know,” stammered Lady Frances, smiling a little awkwardly. “I cannot say I have ever made any experiments in that way myself,

but next time we will talk to old Prosser about it. I do not know what her religious opinions are: I am not sure she has any. Nevertheless I think it more than probable she did and does test her nurseling in the manner you suggest, and finds it to answer to *her* satisfaction at least, for the good creature possesses unbounded faith in Gurty's excellent sense and mental capabilities.

“ ‘The dear child is only very indolent, Lady Frances,’ so affirms nurse, ‘and will not trouble to use her mind as she ought. She would be as clever as either of you young ladies, and, for that matter, a deal cleverer than many others, if she chose; but, there! she won’t, and that’s the long and the short of it.’ ”

In the drawing-room were, on our return, the Marquis of Belford and his brother, Lord Riphon. The latter had that morning come home on a short leave of absence from his regiment.

A peculiar-looking man was Frederick Lord Riphon. Tall, dark-haired, thin, long-featured face, and high-shouldered, thin figure. His

skin was intensely pale and sallow, and his black eyes so unreasonably large they really seemed to monopolize the half of his grave, melancholy countenance. He bowed without speaking when introduced to me, and stared as if looking for the first time in his life at a woman. Never before had I felt so overpoweringly gazed at, and was greatly relieved when the marquis, sitting down beside me, helped to lessen my embarrassment by light conversation, in which Lady Frances joined, and which we kept up until grandmamma and I returned home.

I can hardly say which haunted my mental vision most disagreeably during the remainder of the day—those big, silent eyes or that hideous chimpanzee head and face of the poor child.

“Is Lord Rippon dumb?” I thought. “But no; he is in the Guards, so that cannot be.”

The marquis and Lady Frances had accompanied us out to the carriage-door, the younger brother following a short distance in the rear, and my last impression was the voiceless watching of those eyes from the hall-door as we turned out of the gates.

“What a capital wolf that man would make in the play of ‘Red Ridinghood’!” I exclaimed, furtively looking at him as long as he was in sight.

“You do not admire his eyes, then?” replied my grandmother, smiling.

“No, dear mammy, nor his brother’s either; and yet they are so different.”

Grandmamma did not answer, but an expression of extreme satisfaction beamed over her benevolent countenance at my words. Oh, how benevolent, how pure and good and full of Christian worth, in contrast to the faces I had just left, even the best amongst them!

“But, oh, mammy,” I continued, “your wildest dreams could never bring you to within miles of anything equal to that I have to tell you—that which Lady Frances showed me. It is really so horrible I hardly know how to do justice to the description.”

Grandmamma almost looked frightened at this startling prologue. “Too horrible? why, what do you mean, my child?”

“I will make a start from that point where the duchess (you of course noticed it, mammy)

was so singularly distressed by your simple inquiries about her youngest daughter."

"Yes, I did notice it, dear."

Thereupon I told my strangest of strange tales.

In the evening, too, after dinner, I rushed off with my romance in real life to the Rectory. I could not rest till my morning's adventure had been confided to Sariann's safe and astonished hearing, and we had wondered at and sifted the matter over, and into, and round, and through, to our hearts' content.

With my grandmother and Sariann Beechley the permitted right of confidence ended; nor were they, according to Lady Fanny's earnest request, to extend that same beyond themselves, with the exception of our trustworthy rector, should Sariann desire it.

CHAPTER XIII.

LORD RIPHON.

EARNESTLY I hoped the following Friday would be wet, and could not help throwing the wish into my prayers, although I did not of course put it into words. As if to tantalize me, all Thursday poured with rain, and in the evening looked, I thought, comfortably set in for a steady downfall for days. On the contrary, however, next morning was just such weather as would have rejoiced my heart at any other time. Glorious sunshine, rain-drops dancing and sparkling, birds singing, lingering autumn flowers rising and opening, though still laden with moisture, and, yet more provoking, every promise in earth, air, and sky of a bright continuance during that day at least.

At eleven o'clock off I set, according to appointment, our carriage driving me to the Castle and there leaving me, as I purposed walking home after my sitting to Gurty. How I longed for it to be over! Nothing in the visit promised me any pleasure; for although the Riversdale family had associated so much with easy-mannered foreigners, they seemed never to have been oblivious of their own English birth and exalted position; and their style, even Lady Fanny's, was consequently too artificial, too proud and self-sufficient, to inspire in the heart of so simple a maiden as myself those feelings of ease and cheerful familiarity which from childhood I had been accustomed to entertain towards all my friends, and without which my nature could no more open out joyously than could the petals of a flower expand unsmiled on by the genial sunshine.

I was ushered this time into a different and a pleasanter drawing-room, in my opinion, with spacious windows opening upon the broad, high terrace commanding such a sweep of view. Here the Ladies Riphon were sitting reading or working, I forget which, while on

the outside the brothers Belford and Riphon sauntered up and down smoking cigars.

A large stand, full of green and hot house plants, brilliant in bloom and colour, adorned one of the windows, and harmonized well with the refined, flower-like appearance of the two girls. They were exquisitely dressed, as though holding a crowded drawing-room³ in Paris. Such at least were my unsophisticated ideas, for truly I could not see what more their toilet was capable of, and felt that, up to that moment, I had been profoundly ignorant of the really artistic skill requisite in its arrangement. For the first time, too, the humbling thought flashed through my mind that perhaps, after all, Charles Beechley was right in his low estimate of my worldly attainments, and that I should possibly find myself, by comparison, as unknowing on all other subjects in which the Ladies Hyacinth and Frances were experienced as I evidently was on this of dress.

Lady Hyacinth disconcerted me much at first by a supercilious scanning of my person and dress from under her drooping lids as she affectedly lounged before me in an easy-chair.

My attire consisted of a pretty, light walking-costume, of some material suited to the time of the year (I forget what), in make reasonably subordinate to the tyrant Fashion, and with hat and feather to suit, which had perfectly satisfied me, until thus brought into contact with the superlative elegance of these damsels.

“What an unpolished, unfashionable-looking rustic I must seem to them! I shall never come here again,—that’s all,” thought I, with childish impetuosity.

“It is very kind of you to have so punctually kept your promise,” exclaimed Lady Frances, in a tone of heart-cheering warmth, “and when we have had a little chat I will run up and see whether Gurty is ready for her visitor.”

“Has she remembered well, or at all, that I was coming?” I asked, my own foolish vanities shrinking to nothing at this sudden reminder of this poor child’s gigantic affliction.

“Yes; but not continuously,” replied Frances, “and Prosser kept you in mind by frequent allusions. This morning her intellects were all in their most vigorous state of expectancy, and—”

“Frances has not only a love for the study of cases of *lusus naturæ*, but talent also,” interrupted her sister, laughing meaningly, it seemed to me; “do you not think so, Miss Denzell?—and that she bids fair to equal Dr. Carlinez?”

Lady Frances blushed deeply—painfully, surprising me by her irrepressible confusion in voice and manner.

“I wish you would not talk such nonsense, Hyacinth!” she answered, quite angrily; and, rising, hurried from the room, saying she would see if Gurty was ready to receive me.

“Do, dear,” rejoined the elder girl, with another mischievous laugh, which Frances shut the door upon as quickly as possible.

“Dr. Carlinez is very clever, is he not?” said I, by way of conversation.

“Yes; he is considered one of the first, if not the first psychological physician in the world—quite equal, perhaps superior, to Winslow,” replied Lady Cinthia, dictatorially.

“He must be clever then, indeed!” said I, smiling at what I regarded as a foreign prejudice, “for the English assert exactly the same

of Dr. Winslow, whose fame has been of long, unquestioned standing."

"I hope it is so," she replied, coldly. "We know him well. Mamma is partly under his care, and has been, at Dr. Carlinez's express desire, since our return to England."

"And does he think she will ultimately recover from the shock she received?" I asked.

"Yes; oh, yes, of course she will!—why not?" answered Lady Hyacinth, in an annoyed, half-offended tone.

I thought it best to change the subject—partially at least.

"Did he see Gurty?"

"Yes, he saw Gurty," she replied, indifferently.

"And what did he say of her?—of her mental capacity, I mean?"

"Oh, just the same as Dr. Carlinez. She is one degree only above an idiot,—that is all."

"But he did not say that, surely? Dr. Carlinez does not, you know," I objected.

"Well, they both imply it, which comes to the same thing," said Lady Hyacinth, rather crossly.

She seemed a particularly touchy, bad-tempered girl; disputatious too, as her style of looks had led me to expect. How exceedingly Charles Beechley will dislike her! I thought.

Just then the marquis came to the window and looked in. Seeing me he threw away his cigar, raised his cap, and bowed.

How handsome he was!—handsomer both in figure and face than any man I had seen before; and his high and haughty bearing, of which he did not seem conscious, suited well the refined style of his features.

“Good morning, Miss Denzell. I saw your carriage driving up the avenue a short time ago, and was under the impression you had, on reaching the Castle, proceeded at once upon your mission of charity. Just now, however. I either glimpsed your fair presence or some magnetic influence warned me of the fact. Which should you say it was?”

He came forward while speaking, and sat down nearly opposite to me, and gazed with disagreeably undisguised admiration into my face.

“Oh, mesmeric influence, certainly,” I replied, laughing.

"You think so?" he said, a peculiar expression coming into his half-closed eyes and round his mouth, which, to my exceeding annoyance, brought a tumultuous rush of blood to my cheeks. He was wondrously gracious this morning; what made him so? thought I.

"If you were under the belief I was upstairs," I retorted, with all the gay indifference I could assume, "what induced you to look into this room, unless mysteriously impelled thereto?"

"Do you believe in mesmerism, Miss Denzell?" asked Lady Hyacinth, before her brother could answer.

"Well—yes—in a measure, I do. I do not see how one can disbelieve it entirely; do you?"

"I suspect you are something more than a disciple; a *practitioner*," interposed the marquis, the same gleam in his eyes discomfiting me as before.

"I wonder whether Gurty is ready for me," I said, turning to the sister to hide my silly confusion.

Lady Hyacinth was regarding her brother with a cross, annoyed expression, and responded promptly to my question,—

“Oh, yes; I am sure she is. Will you like to come and see?” rising as she spoke.

“Be advised by me, Miss Denzell,” suggested the marquis; “change your plans altogether, and, instead of immuring yourself in that prison all this beautiful morning, come and walk in the gardens and conservatory. I must confess to feeling a jealous longing to see whether we cannot equal (rival, of course, is out of the question) the green-tipped beauty of Riversdale Court.”

“Oh, but—” interrupted Lady Hyacinth.

“Oh, no,” I replied, quickly. “I promised poor little Gurty, and would not think of disappointing her on any account.”

The noble Reginald’s brow darkened; he was not accustomed to being thwarted by chits of girls; that was evident.

“Disappoint her!” he repeated; “do you imagine for one moment she remembered your promise half an hour afterwards?”

“Yes, I do, for Lady Frances told me Gurty was eagerly expecting me this morning.”

“Frances?—she is a perfect fanatic about that—that unfortunate creature!” replied the marquis, contracting his forehead and raising

his eyebrows with a perplexed, disgusted expression. "I declare I do not understand her. She is full of wild notions of humanizing the girl; and what object she has in view by so doing I cannot conceive, for, of course, no one but Prosser and herself will ever have a chance of seeing and appreciating the improvement, if any is effected even."

"Perhaps Lady Frances has a higher and better motive for her conduct than you give her credit for," I answered, my cheeks beginning to burn, but resolved, nevertheless, to bravely speak out, "knowing that her poor little sister is very delicate, and not—"

"Oh, pray do not call that dreadful creature our *sister*!" interrupted Lady Hyacinth, in a voice and manner of such haughty impatience.

I felt my eyes flash angrily, and answered as haughtily as herself,—

"Well, of course you need not speak of or regard her as a sister if the idea is so repugnant to you; but the truth remains the same—she is not the less so on that account."

"Just so, Miss Denzell; you are quite right, as Burke can testify," observed the marquis, looking surprised and vexed at his sister's rude-

ness; "but pray continue what you were going to say," he added, with polite interest.

"It is this,—knowing how frail and delicate Gurty is, almost certain, according to medical opinion, to be very short lived, Lady Frances is probably anxious to prepare her for that happiness in another world which she has been so cruelly debarred from in this."

"Ah—yes—perhaps so, indeed; that idea did not strike me before," rejoined the marquis, with affected gravity, and looking down as he spoke.

Lady Hyacinth laughed in unmistakably genuine amusement—a little polished laugh, certainly, but not the less offensive to my pride on that account.

"Pray excuse me, Miss Denzell," she exclaimed, trying to restrain her mirth; "but, did you know Francis and Gurty as well as I do, you would, I am sure, laugh heartily too at so romantic a notion."

"Romantic notion!" repeated I. "Why, I cannot imagine anything less so!"

"The real truth is," interposed the marquis, "Frances, like all idle young ladies, must have a pet hobby to bestow her unoccupied hours upon, her sympathies and sensibilities; and

the tanning, training, and polishing little Lady Guernsey answers that purpose admirably."

"My firm conviction is that Gurty is an elf changeling," said Lady Hyacinth, seriously. "I assure you I am in earnest," she added, with increasing warmth, as my incredulous eyes met hers. "Formerly I should have regarded such an idea with the profoundest contempt; but my opinions on the point have lately so altered, nothing would persuade me that that awful little creature is my sister—nothing!"

At this juncture Lord Riphon walked in at the window, made a solemn bow as he wished me good morning, expressed his opinions concerning the weather, then, planting his tall, thin figure on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, and his hands in his coat-tail pockets, he fixed his big eyes upon me pertinaciously.

He need not have been chary of speaking, I thought, for his voice was very musical, and full of agreeable intonations. Notwithstanding his worldly life and profession, it was plain to see he was a shy man, and discomfited by the presence of strangers; and this natural sensitiveness had clung to him through all his changing

and continual intercourse with every phase of society.

Presently the slight coating of reserve he brought in was thrown off, and he chatted of places and things with a lightness, fluency, and knowledge that was altogether new to me, and as delightfully amusing as it was instructive, and quite cast into shadow his brother's everyday conversational powers. After awhile I saw that the latter was beginning to inwardly chafe at this monopoly of attention to the setting aside of himself; for, when thus exerting his capabilities of pleasing, Lord Riphon was, in my girlish opinion, infinitely the most attractive man of the two; yes, despite his long, pale, sunken cheeks, dismal expression, and general inferiority in personal appearance to his handsome brother.

As I listened, often laughing at his humorous descriptions with an irrepressible heartiness, which Lady Hyacinth's high-bred look of surprise warned me I was most improperly allowing to overflow the bounds of fashionable propriety, the marquis became more and more silent, and only spoke to occasionally attempt to put down Lord Frederick, which attempts,

made in a half-sneering, captious tone, caused that gentleman to each time stop and stare at his noble brother in a perplexed, questioning manner that secretly amused me much.

This apparently tacit reproof—though, in fact, it was not intended as such, the marquis's unusual behaviour really puzzling Lord Frederick—had the effect, however, of disconcerting the equanimity of the former, for, throwing back his head, he contented himself with watching me over his well-formed nose with exceedingly offended, jealous eyes. Just then Frances returned, blithely exclaiming,—

“We are quite ready now, Ennis! I am afraid I have kept you a long time.”

“Yes, you *have* been a long while, Fanny!” replied the marquis, recovering his good humour; “I think it is really due to your friend—and indeed to your family—to enlighten them as to the cause.”

“Oh, a variety of circumstances occurred to detain me,” she replied, evasively; “but we can go up now,” turning to me.

“Yes, I should think so,” interposed the marquis. “I was trying, before you came in, to induce Miss Denzell to give up her benevo-

lent intentions and spend an hour in the gardens and greenhouses instead ; but she positively refuses. Perhaps *you* might be more successful, Frederick. Suppose you exercise a little of that eloquence of which you are so proud, and try what you can do."

Lord Frederick did not answer, but his great eyes, as he turned them upon me, seemed to speak volumes. "It must be their size," I thought, "gives them that talkative expression." I replied as if he had spoken—imagining he had done so, in fact,—

"Oh, no ; I cannot break my promise to Gurty ; besides, to confess a very natural weakness, she draws so beautifully I am quite anxious to see a representation of myself from her pencil. I am quite ready, Frances."

"Then, come on, dear ; for so am I."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIRST SKETCH.

“You may conceive my annoyance,” Frances began, as we hurried through the hall—she laughed with a gaiety that seemed at variance with her words, “when upon going into Gurty’s room expecting to find her fully prepared to receive you—would you believe it?—there she was—actually in her bath!”

“In her bath?” I repeated, joining heartily in the laugh; “why, what sudden whim had possessed her?”

“She delights in bathing, and, suddenly forgetful of your promised visit, ran into the bathroom unperceived by Prosser, slipped off her clothes, and popped into the water, where I found her floundering and tumbling about with all the delight of a young Newfoundland dog.”

I inwardly shrank as I thought of the hideous appearance she must have presented, and wondered again at Frances.

“As you may suppose,” she resumed, “it required some little time after such disarrangement to restore matters to their former state for your proper reception!”

“I should think so!” laughed I, and then took the opportunity of making my request not to be left alone with Gurty.

“Your objection is perfectly natural, dear Ennis,” replied Lady Frances, smiling; “but you can have no idea how little reason exists for fears of any kind connected with that afflicted child. I do not think that in all the world there is a living thing more utterly devoid of courage, so timid, so gentle and submissive as she is. An angry look or word from you would send her flying into the next room, and perhaps under the bed—anywhere that removed her beyond sight or sound of alarm. Dr. Carlinez said that the shock mamma’s system had received had wholly destroyed all human nerve in the unborn child.”

“Poor little creature!” said I; adding, “what a blessing it would be to you all, and

even to Gurty, if Dr. Carlinez, who seems such an honourable, amiable man, were to agree to permanently keep her in his Hospice d'Aliénés. Now that they believe her dead, she might safely return there, I should think."

"Honourable and amiable!" repeated Frances. "Yes, he is the very soul of both. If you were to see him you would say it is impossible he could be anything else with such a form as his, such a head and face!"

She spoke with an unconscious warmth that excited my attention. Her cheeks were crimson, but being slightly in advance of me, ascending the stairs, and with bent head, she thought I did not perceive her confusion. The tell-tale blood defied all concealment, however, and surged round and about her delicate throat to the roots of her glossy hair.

"Ho, ho!" I mentally ejaculated, while a thrill of intense amazement rendered me silent for the moment. "I have discovered—unintentionally enough—discovered your secret, my Lady Frances, your heart, your life-secret. Now it is clear to me; now I know the reason of this exceeding interest in that poor, dreadful little creature. How extraordinary! in love

with the keeper of a lunatic asylum!—you, too, the daughter of the proud Duke and Duchess of Riversdale and I know not how many places besides; and what a clever device, what constant opportunities, and apparently so natural, so unavoidable, in fact, for constant meetings between herself and the doctor! I feel no doubt too, my Lady Frances, that your sisterly anxiety presents a very fair excuse to keep up a tolerably vigorous correspondence with the psychologist.”

Gurty sat at the table in her own especial window, and all the drawing apparatus round her.

Ah me! how appallingly ugly she looked! I thought her even more so than at first. She did not speak, but steadfastly watched my advance, blinking her solemn little passionless eyes, and raising her prominent brows up and down—a prominence peculiar in the large monkey species, if not the small, which denotes—so say the phrenologists—powerful organs of perceptiveness, observation, and discernment, and which form those mysterious links of affinity between man and monkey.

“Now, Lady Gurty, Lady Gurty, where are

your pretty manners ? ” exclaimed Mrs. Prosser, to my annoyance. How foolishly anxious the good, affectionate creature was to impress others with her own kind-hearted belief in the understanding and intellect of her nurseling !

“ When that beautiful young lady has come on purpose to see you again,” she continued, “ and sit for her picture because you wished it, why do you not get up immediately and go and shake hands with her, and thank her for coming, instead of merely staring in that rude way ? ”

For very shame I was forced to stand still and wait the approach of the little girl ; and, oh, did not I feel inclined to turn round and run out of the room as fast as I could, when in gentle obedience to Prosser’s directions Gurty quite deliberately came towards me with outstretched hand. She merely put it into mine, —a dry, hot hand that made not the slightest responsive movement to the nervous, shrinking clasp I ventured to bestow upon it.

“ There ! now let us proceed to business,” suggested Frances, who stood by with an exceedingly amused face, watching this strange, silent greeting. “ Sit down again, dear ” ;

whereupon Gurty seated herself at once on a chair beside me.

“No, no, Gurty; you know that is not what I mean,” said her sister, laughing.

“Yes, you know very well, you little mischief,” added nurse, smiling, “but in your heart you are making a bit of play for yourself, you naughty thing! It won’t do, however, so go back to your chair by the table”; and Gurty, who looked about as playfully disposed as I was, mechanically obeyed orders, and returned to her seat. Taking off my hat I, under Lady Fanny’s direction, placed myself in picturesque position opposite the strange portrait-painter, who, to my great surprise, disapproved, on several points, of our artistic arrangements.

“No, no, not that way,” tolled the deep, mournful voice, in slow, hesitating tones, but expressing an interest and comprehension of the matter she had manifested on no other subject. Then followed divers doleful orders to fix my arm in one way, my face, head, drapery, &c., in another, the combined alterations producing an infinitely more tasteful *tout ensemble* than Frances and I could together effect.

“Has she ever painted from life before?” asked I, in a low voice, as Gurty, with rapid glances, and marvellously quick strokes of her pencil, proceeded with the operation of sketching.

“Oh yes, several times,” replied Frances, smiling, “though only three faces; but upon those three she has run every variety of change.”

“Whose were they?” I questioned, as Frances ceased speaking.

“Well, mine and Prosser’s and—Dr. Carlinez’s. Her anxiety to possess your likeness is the highest compliment poor little Gurty can pay you. She is singularly capricious or fanciful with regard to countenances. No persuasions, no entreaties, of papa’s or my brothers, or Hyacinth can induce her to take a pencil in hand in their service; and when occasionally, upon losing patience, Reginald or Cinth has spoken crossly to her, all the good they did was to send her shrinking and trembling away like a beaten dog, or to throw herself on the ground beside Prosser and bury her face in her lap. She must *like* people, or she will have nothing whatever to do with them—neither by word nor deed.”

“She liked me at once, without even speaking to me,” I remarked; “how strangely whimsical that seemed!”

“It proved she is endowed with more wonderfully keen physiognomical powers than even Dr. Carlinez is aware of,” replied Lady Frances.

While this conversation went on, Gurty, absorbed in her occupation, evidently paid no more heed to our words than if we had been discussing politics: even the mention of her name, and of her favourite, Dr. Carlinez, failed to attract her attention; her brain could but admit of one idea at a time. It was curious, too, how that single ray of intellect tended to humanize and brighten the expression of her animal face.

And now a rap sounded at the outer door, which I had observed was always kept locked, and the next instant the Marquis of Belford and Lady Hyacinth were admitted.

At once Gurty suspended work, and looked at them, a singular expression of distrust, suspicion, nervousness, and even fear clouding her before heavily placid features.

“Well, Beauty, how do you and this fine morning get on together?” said the marquis, in

a tone the heartlessness of which, under existing circumstances, grated unpleasantly on my feelings.

“May I see what progress you have made?” he added, approaching Gurty.

She was at all times remarkably silent, and now, without speaking, watched his advance. How distressingly like a mere animal she looked just then, with depressed head, upturned, misdoubting eyes, and general aspect of guardedness!

“Oh, do not go too near her, Reggie!” exclaimed Lady Hyacinth, in a genuine tone of alarm; “do you not see she dislikes it? She may bite you, or do something horrid!”

Reginald seemed rather inclined to be of the same opinion, for, stopping near the table, he held out his hand, saying, in a propitiatory voice,—

“Have you any objection to showing me your sketch, Gurty?”

Her only answer was to grasp her drawing, and springing up with an alacrity I had not thought her capable of, and which made the noble marquis start back in a very undignified fashion, bound gracefully away into the bed-

room and shut and lock the door behind her.

“Goodness! what a creature! Talk of her possessing any intellect!” panted Lady Hyacinth.

The marquis looked at me with an amused smile, raising his eyebrows and shrugging his shoulders in true French style that made me laugh.

“Well—that has settled the matter effectually and at once,” cried Lady Frances, gaily. “I was waiting to see what she would do, feeling quite sure no sight of the picture was in store for you in its present embryo state. Gurty has a particular objection to hearing her productions criticized while still in a crude or at all unfinished condition.”

“I am curious to see what she will make of you, Miss Denzell,” said the marquis, looking earnestly at me; “for it is a fact—and a strange one—that no first-rate portrait-painter can be more skilful in striking off a correct, happy likeness than is my Lady Guernsey, when it so pleases her.”

“And which it does in Ennis Denzell’s case, to an extent I never saw equalled in Gurty before.”

"*I can quite understand that,*" rejoined the marquis, bowing and smiling with the condescending air of a man who considers that such a compliment from such a quarter to so simple a damsel could not fail of being fully appreciated. His own appreciation of the same was so apparent that instead of flattered I felt offended, and, ignoring both speaker and speech, rose, saying gravely,—

"I suppose the sitting must be considered over for to-day. Gurty is not likely to return for some time—do you think she is? But, indeed, if she does, her mind would now be in too unsettled a state to allow of her sketching with any chance of success."

"Oh, no! she will not do anything more this morning," answered Frances, in a vexed tone. "You knew if you came in" (addressing her brother and sister) "you would upset all our proceedings, and I cannot think why you did so."

"Yes; I hope the next time I come you will not disturb us," said I, still secretly chafing at the thought of Reginald's patronizing smile; "for I am quite anxious to have a good picture of myself."

I was donning my hat and mantle as I spoke, and assumed an expression of self-approbation and vanity I did not really possess a sensation of, and the girlish folly of which I smile at as I now write.

“Well,” interposed Lady Hyacinth, “whatever our motive for coming up here, we have certainly now had more than enough of this room and its odious associations. Come, Belford, let us go down.”

The “noble Reginald”—by-the-bye, I forgot, I think, to say that the term of honour, “noble,” was bestowed upon him by his mother, whose favourite he was—paid no heed to the elder girl’s suggestion, but stood leaning against the centre table, watching me with a rather puzzled face. Lady Hyacinth waited a minute at the door, then, tossing her haughty head in a way peculiar to her, left the room, saying, impatiently,—

“Well, if you will not come I shall go without you.”

I wished to be left alone with Frances for a few minutes before my departure, and purposely lingered over my dressing arrangements in hopes that the marquis would follow his

sister. But he did not; politeness restrained him, I thought, and perhaps to a certain extent it did; but, taking up a book, he turned over the pages in a desultory manner, resolved, evidently, to abide my time.

“Have you any completed portrait of yourself by Gurty?” I asked, turning to Frances; “I should exceedingly like to see it, if you have.”

“Yes, two or three; and if you are ready we will come down to the drawing-room, where I can show you one which I am sure you will agree with me is executed in a masterly style.”

The marquis followed us as we descended the stairs, but not into the drawing-room. I was annoyed he did not do so; for my irritation was fast subsiding, and I now began to feel apprehensive I had really offended him by my not very polite hint that his presence was undesired by me.

Lady Hyacinth and Lord Frederick were there, the latter lying his full length on a sofa, reading. He put his feet down as we entered, and, resting his open book on his knee, fixed his big eyes on my face.

“Not for the world would I say so,” thought

I, "but there is a something in that look of yours, my Lord Riphon, that singularly disagreeably reminds me of your poor little monster sister—an expression inherited from one or other of your parents—the mother, I fancy—and which the monkey visage is, to a certain extent, susceptible of, as well as the human."

Lady Frances showed me her picture. It was an admirable likeness. The painting required softening, perhaps, but the colouring was nevertheless wonderfully correct,—altogether a charming portrait of about the size of one's hand, handsomely mounted.

"This is delightful!" I exclaimed. "If Gurty is only as successful in delineating my features, expression, and style as she has been with yours, her own satisfaction will be as complete as mine. Poor little artist!"

Frances and I remained standing, and Lord Riphon came and stood beside me, and spoke of Gurty and her talent for drawing, expressing himself concerning her in a style whose good sense and good feeling were infinitely pleasant to hear, in contrast to the heartless, often disgusted tone adopted by the elder brother and sister.

Soon after I quitted the Castle, promising to pay Gurty another visit soon; and, accompanied by Lady Frances and Lord Riphon—the first donning a garden hat and jacket lying in the hall—together walked through a portion of the park on my way home. I saw the marquis on the terrace, but he made no movement to go with us.

Frances and I chatted gaily, and, infecting Lord Riphon with our mirthfulness, his long, pale face and great eyes became almost handsome under the brightening influence.

“Of the two brothers I declare I like you best,” thought I; “you are not so good looking by many, many degrees, nor so important by many more, or, in all human probability, ever likely to be so (important, I mean, of course), but you are considerably more clever, better read, and in every way more agreeable. Added to which you are, I feel sure, more amiable in disposition and temper than is the noble Reginald.”

When we reached the principal lodge gates, Frances shook hands and bade me good-bye; but Lord Riphon declared it his intention to see me safely home.

“I hope, Fred, you have well considered the responsibilities of your knightly undertaking,” laughed his sister. “Remember that if danger, no matter of how perilous a nature, threatens any one on the road—man, woman, or child—Ennis will rush to the rescue; and upon you, as her squire, immediately devolves the double duty of hindering the lady from wildly risking her precious life, by chivalrously casting yourself headlong into the breach.”

The brother smiled quietly at me, but did not answer; and so Frances and I parted, looking back at each other and nodding with all the ease and familiarity of a long-established friendship. It is surprising how rapid is the growth of intimacy between girls when so inclined. For my part, I felt as if we had been acquainted since childhood, and this feeling lessened considerably the restraint and shyness I should otherwise have experienced during my walk home with Lord Frederick.

“Mind and tell me if he shows the white feather, Ennis,” Frances called from a distance.

“That I will!” laughed I.

“Would you, though?” questioned Lord Riphon, smiling.

“Would *you*, though?” I retorted, colouring under the earnestness of his gaze.

“Show the white feather? Well, that is not a question that can be readily answered. Like every other act in life, or the majority at least, it admits of a variety of opinions. It might be an open question, for instance, whether or not the declared feather *was* really white. ‘Prudence is the better part of valour,’ is another old saying, and, in my judgment,” he added, smiling, “one of the wisest. Perhaps—during this walk, at least—I should do well to adopt it as my motto.”

“Oh, Lord Riphon, for shame! for shame!” I cried, laughing gaily; “I declare if you are not discovering the tip of a white feather already!”

He did not answer, but looked with so peculiar an expression in his powerful eyes that mine sank before them, and an indefinable feeling of apprehension of what he might say next suddenly changed my frank, friendly sentiments into a capricious sort of dislike, which I was afterwards ashamed of. He had drawn

closer than pleased this unamiable mood of mine, and, unreflectingly, I walked further apart.

Lord Riphon instantly perceived the movement, and perchance more besides than I was conscious of, for his tone and manner subsided at once into their normal style of grave politeness; but he made no attempt to return nearer to my side. He was not at all offended or hurt, and affected not to see my altered mien, but, changing the conversation, talked so pleasantly that very soon the little discomfiture, or whatever it was—for truly I did not myself know what I really felt—passed away, and we were both chatting again as gaily as at first.

Arrived at Riversdale Court, I was rather surprised by his accepting my invitation to come in and rest, and see my grandmother, with whom he was not acquainted; and at her request he even remained to partake of our early dinner. During his stay he pleased me more than he had yet done by his obvious pleasure in her society; her agreeable conversation, charming expression of countenance, and sweet, gentle manners evidently quite fascinating him.

“I must say I am very desirous of an introduction to the belle with the pink dress and green facings whom I heard of this morning,” said Lord Riphon, smiling.

We had returned to the drawing-room, and I to my favourite seat in the oriel window, the gentleman—who, by the way, seemed in no hurry to depart—placing himself near, and dividing his attention between grandmamma and me and the lovely home view without.

“Are you?” replied I; “then I will run out and bring you in one of her daughters—a sweet pretty maiden in the first bloom of beauty, whom I was admiring this morning. All the others, a numerous family, have faded and died; but fortunately just this one is left.”

I rose as I spoke to hasten from the room, being anxious to escape a *tête-à-tête* walk with his lordship in the garden.

“Oh, no; I cannot think of allowing you to take that trouble,” protested the gentleman, rising also. “I can see it just as well in—” but ere he concluded I had flown, and the door shut behind me. Half fearing he might follow, I ran on; but he did not. Grandmamma told me he watched my departure with an amused

look, then walked to the window and stood there, saying he should not have thought I had been so fleet footed—a compliment (if intended as such) I by no means appreciated, regarding it as a sort of reflection upon the cumbrous proportions of my large-limbed figure.

In a very unrefined state of redness and breathlessness I returned after my scamper, and proudly presented the young queen of the garden to Lord Frederick. What a vulgar rustic the marquis and Lady Hyacinth would have thought me!

“Is it not beautiful?” I panted, with corresponding ungracefulness. “Did you ever see anything so perfect before?”

“Never!—beautiful! more beautiful than a poet’s dream!”

He spoke very low, and in a tone of such rapturous earnestness that, gratified and delighted, I looked up expecting to find his admiring gaze riveted on the flower. Instead, I met what felt almost like a blaze of light fixed on my face only; and, with the instant conviction that, in Riversdale spirit, he was secretly laughing at me and my sweet little rosebud, I coloured hotly, and, turning away, sat down by grand-

mamma and pretended great interest in the work she was doing. What that work was I could not have told had I been asked. Presently he left us, looking, it seemed to me, very much perplexed in countenance, and a good deal graver in voice and manner, nevertheless carefully retaining the "green tip," which he fastened in a button-hole of his coat.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DINNER.

GRANDMAMMA and I were soon honoured by an invitation to dinner from the duke and duchess ; but the age and infirmities of the former preventing her dining out late, or paying visits of any kind that might involve exposure to night air, it was settled I should accompany the rector and his daughter, who were also invited. But when, according to appointment, I called for them in the carriage, I found that Dr. Beechley was hindered by a slight indisposition from going, and thereupon Sariann and I gaily decided to chaperon each other, and off we set.

Sariann was robed in blue silk and pearl ornaments, which well became her clear complexion and cameo style of features ; I in white

watered silk, with gold and turquoise necklet, earrings, and bracelets, and a bouquet of flowers on my bosom. The weather was just then too wet and stormy for lighter toilets. A rather large party was already assembled in one of the drawing-rooms when we arrived, for several visitors were staying in the Castle.

The duchess made me sit beside her, and stared at and talked to me in her languid, indolent fashion. My neck and arms seemed especially to attract her attention, often fixing her eyes, which reminded me of Lord Riphon's, upon them with a steadfastness that discomfited me.

"I am sure," thought I, "she is secretly condemning their proportions as much too massive for a girl of my age. I wonder, by-the-bye, whether the bodice of my dress is cut too low, or whether the sleeves are too short!" But, no; to my relief I saw that my dress was high in contrast to those of her daughters and many others present; and again I mentally returned to my first unflattering belief, and envied Sariann, who was sitting in the distance chatting composedly with merry little Monica Dormer.

At that instant the duke, whose approach I had not observed, drew a chair close to the sofa we were on, and sat down behind me. This move occasioned a happy diversion in my favour, for, as he immediately struck up a lively, bantering conversation, after the manner of gallant old gentlemen with young ladies, I had a fair excuse for turning my head to one side or the other, and thus concealing those milkmaid blushes which were my constant annoyance. But now more guests arrived, and duke and duchess left me to receive them, just as the marquis, who had not before been present, entered through the folding-door of an adjoining room. Casting a hasty glance round, he saw me, and instantly came forward. Lord Riphon also at the same moment left some ladies with whom he was talking afar off, and advanced to take possession of the chair vacated by his father. I know not whether he perceived the intention of the marquis, but his movements being (as indeed they generally were) considerably quicker than those of his habitually slow, haughty brother, he obtained some steps in advance, and sat down on the desired chair. The noble Reginald knit his

brows angrily on being thus balked, and, bowing to me, stood an instant doubtful where to place himself, then crossed over and sank into the seat beside me on the couch, and usually occupied by his mother,—regarded, indeed, as her special place.

“I do not suppose you have been able to venture far beyond your grounds this wet weather, Miss Denzell?” he questioned, ignoring Lord Frederick, who, in his quiet, pleasant-toned voice, was expressing a hope that the *Bella Donna Rosa* of my garden had escaped injury during the storms of the last few days.

Both remarks were little more than variations on the same subject, and it really mattered not which I answered first; but as my intimacy increased with the Castle family I had often observed this rudeness towards the younger brother on the part of the elder—this “Stand aside, for I am better than thou”—and thought it betrayed a very unamiable disposition.

Frances declared she had never seen anything of the kind between them before, and could not now understand or account for it. In my opinion it was simply the domineering assumption of the heir apparent over the com-

paratively unimportant younger son, and, influenced by this feeling, I affected not to hear the former, but laughingly replied to Lord Riphon touching the healthful condition of the Bella Donna.

I fully expected that the noble Reginald would have risen, and in his nonchalant fashion left the unmannerly rustic to the (to her) more congenial enjoyment of the society of his insignificant brother. Not so, however; he quietly waited until I ceased speaking, then changing his question, in a perfectly unoffended tone, asked me if I ever rode out—was I fond of horse-exercise.

I turned, of course, to look at him as I answered, and was beyond measure astonished, even distressed, to see how exceedingly pale he had become.

That he was feeling suddenly very ill, was my first impression; my second, that he was, with much effort, suppressing a fit of wrathful indignation which my unceremonious behaviour had excited. Fearing I had really been very rude—and I was the more inclined to that opinion by reason of his unaltered good temper—I instantly strove to make the *amende honorable*

by a seeming eager interest in the matter which I did not feel.

“Yes,” said I, “I should exceedingly like to ride; indeed I cannot imagine any exercise more delightful or more healthful.”

“And yet you do not ride?” replied the marquis, in a tone of surprise. “I have always considered equestrian exercise as forming an indispensable part of a country lady’s education, and that—and that they could not get on in the country without it.”

I interrupted, smiling, and blushing for my educational deficiency, “Nevertheless I have managed hitherto to do very well, though often, I candidly confess, regretting that grand-mamma’s nervous fear of my venturing on horseback absolutely debars me from the pleasure.”

“But if you were mounted on a perfect horse,” suggested the marquis, with recovered cheerfulness, “gentle as a lamb, quiet and tractable as a circus steed, do you think Lady Denzell would fear to trust you then? We have two or three just such trustworthy animals in our stables, which it would afford us (I can answer for all my family as for myself) infinite

pleasure if you would make use of; and," lowering his voice considerably, "nothing would gratify me more than accompanying and taking every possible care of you."

"What could have made me think this man haughty and unconciliating?" I mentally questioned: "why no one could be more frank and good-natured."

The offer was a most tempting one, and so I told him, and that I should take the earliest favourable opportunity of laying it, with all its recommendations, before my grandmother, sincerely hoping such a combination might induce her to change her mind, and permit me to accept his kind proposal.

The marquis did not answer, but while his face brightened there came a steadfast questioning expression in his eyes that puzzled me greatly.

"Unless one is a very good walker," I continued, "which I confess I am not, riding affords the sole chance of viewing far-off points of beautiful scenery, only to be reached by a bridle-path, sheep-walk, or some such half-civilized mode of access. I know of many such round this neighbourhood, but the majority through report; I have seen very few as yet."

“And I know of many from ocular demonstration,” broke in Lord Riphon, “having walked and ridden over the country for miles and miles in every direction. I think I can truly say there are few, perhaps not another, as well able to guide you to all that is worth seeing as I am.”

“Hear, hear!” exclaimed the marquis, in tones of ill-concealed irony.

Again I thought the elder brother very unamiable, and wondered what poor Lord Frederick’s polite speech contained that was offensive to him. With greater warmth of manner than I might otherwise have shown I thanked Lord Riphon for his obliging offer, “but my being able to accept it,” I added, smiling, “must depend entirely upon my grandmother.”

“I assure you, Miss Denzell, my capabilities are quite equal to my brother’s,” interposed the marquis; “for although, like yourself, I am no great walker, I have ridden all over the country, and am well acquainted with every spot of any note far and near.”

I was saved the trouble of answering by the announcement of dinner; a general stir imme-

diately followed, and gentlemen and ladies paired off, according to the rights of precedence, to the dining-room.

I was confided to the care of old Sir John Glenfield, one of the visitors staying at the Castle, whom I quickly found to be an Epicurean, whose heart and soul were entirely devoted to the science and enjoyment of eating.

Hitherto I had regarded the latter but in one light—reasonably (as Miss Pitt had taught me) allowing the sensual passion a fair amount of natural gratification—and that one light was “eating to live”; but ere the dinner was a quarter over I should have blushed had Sir John discovered how deplorably, in my ignorance on so momentous a matter, I had reversed the true statement of the case, “living to eat.”

Among other useful pieces of information on the subject, the old gentleman obligingly supplied me with a list of names of the few hotels—for shame to England that it was so! the very few—at all reliable for good dinners and breakfasts, or, in fact, for good fare of any kind. As for private houses (lowering his voice) well, he was sorry to say (*entre nous*) that with few exceptions—in that of our present

noble host, for instance—the living was—yes, positively, was execrable!

As Sir John warmed with his exciting subject, he evidently overlooked altogether my unappreciative age, sex, and tastes. Looking up, I encountered Lord Riphon's eyes fixed upon me, full of an intensely amused expression; and, feeling that my own instantly flashed with responsive merriment, hastily bent them as before on my plate. No necessity for concealment just then, however, for Sir John, in the highest enjoyment, was feeding on some exquisite compound, the creation of the French cook's brains and hands, and from which delectation nothing less, I am sure, than the Castle being on fire could have withdrawn his attention—if even that would have done it. Again I glanced at Lord Riphon, who sat nearly opposite to me. He was bending his head, apparently listening to some remark of the lady he had escorted to the dinner-table, a stately, handsome girl; but in truth was still surreptitiously entertaining himself, noting the effects of the new phase of instruction in useful knowledge I was receiving from Sir John Glenfield.

Lord Frederick smiled, and so did I, and, running my eyes along the guests, caught the Marquis of Belford leaning forward to see whom I was smiling at.

Having satisfied his curiosity, he turned his scrutiny on me, knitting his brows, and with an angry gleam in his eyes which I affected not to observe, but glanced indifferently on the lady beside him. She was neither very young nor was she pretty, and, perhaps, for those reasons less inclined to submit patiently to neglect, for, after looking questioningly at her cavalier, to whom she had obviously been speaking without receiving any attention, her eyes followed the direction of his, and lighted on me. The next instant her glance of mere curiosity deepened into a gaze of such intense earnestness that my cheeks burned.

“She must have known mamma,” I thought; “who can she be?”

With praiseworthy self-control I listened to an elaborate description from Sir John on the superiority of the French style of dressing vegetables over the English; then ventured to take advantage of a pause to inquire whether

he could tell me the name of the dark-haired lady sitting on the right of the Marquis of Belford.

The old gentleman, for a second or two, seemed quite confused at this abrupt bringing down of his thoughts and ideas from their exalted height to so trifling, so mundane a matter as the name of a lady, and disconcerted me by staring unconsciously at the object of my inquiry a full minute, at least, ere he could sufficiently collect his divided senses to bear upon the point to enable him to answer me. Finally, as his understanding lightened, he remembered that her name was Bristow, only daughter of the deceased Earl and Countess of Cliffhead.

“And I have an idea,” added Sir John, lowering his voice confidentially, while at the same time his eyes wandered over the sweets and flowers on the gorgeously appointed table with a keen, criticizing eagerness,—“an idea that the duke and duchess would be well pleased to see a union of hands, if not hearts, in that quarter.”

“Would they?” exclaimed I, in amazement, but speaking also in subdued tones. “Why

should they wish it? Is she very rich?—but oh, if she was, what would that signify to people so abundantly endowed in that way themselves?”

Sir John smiled and shook his grey head—an old grey head full of knowledge, experiences, and suspicions of years.

“Besides, she is not young,” I resumed,—“at least, she is older, I mean, than the marquis; and—and—do you think her good looking? I cannot say I do; there is a something so unpleasant in the general expression of her face.”

“Your objections are quite natural at your age, and with your attractions, my fair young lady,” replied Sir John, guardedly. “Lady Elizabeth is, I believe, four or five and thirty, and the gentleman must be some eight or perhaps ten years younger—a frightful disparity, no doubt, in your sixteen-year-old judgment, and—”

“I am between seventeen and eighteen,” I hurriedly interrupted, feeling much annoyed at this imputation, I thought, of childishness.

Sir John smiled with aggravating indifference. It was clear he was no whit more im-

pressed with feelings of respect for eighteen than sixteen, and continued, with a yet more amused expression,—

“At your age, nine or ten years ahead on the woman’s side is a serious matter. In reality, however, it is nothing when supported by rich and noble acres and houses and gold, which more than fill up the gap ’twixt five-and-twenty and four-and-thirty. That, at any rate, is the view maturity and self-interest take of such things, and those are, I fancy, my young friend Belford’s sentiments.”

“But he is, or will be, so rich himself,” I still objected. “They are such a wealthy family—a well-known wealthy family! What can they want more money for?”

Sir John was sipping a glass of wine.

“Ah, my pretty young lady, when you are better acquainted with this lucre-loving hemisphere of ours you will find that, so far from great wealth bringing contentment, no amount of it satisfies people: the richer they are, the richer they want to be. Dame Fortune’s motto is, ‘Wealth to the wealthy,’ and upon that principle, depend upon it, the marquis will add to his possessions by taking to himself, if not Lady

Elizabeth, some Lady Millionaire, for his wife. That is one of the ways by which the world goes round, my dear Miss Denzell," continued my old epicure, again sipping his wine and shaking his bald head complacently.

The excellent dinner had evidently done its duty, and filled his whole being with a placid charity for the world generally. I had never seen any one look in so beaming a state of rapture and repletion, as, leaning back in his chair, he smiled down with benign superiority upon poor simple me, and, indeed, on all the company round.

Oh, how weary I was becoming of this long dinner and uninteresting talk, and how glad when the duchess at last signified her pleasure to withdraw.

"Is not the air delightfully cool and refreshing in this hall, Enny, contrasted with the heat and overpowering combination of scents in the dining-room?" murmured a voice beside me, and an arm was passed within mine.

I pressed the latter, feeling instantly as cheered in spirit by hand and voice as by a soft south breeze on my flushed face.

"Whereabouts did you sit, Sariann? for not

a glimpse could I obtain of your dear face all the dinner-time."

"I was on the same side as yourself; and not only that, but between us sat an enormously large fat lady, who effectually obstructed every point by which I might have occasionally caught sight of your dear face."

"Excepting the Dormers and yourself there is no one here among the guests whom I know," said I, as together we placed ourselves on a small settee in a retired part of one of the drawing-rooms.

"Captain Bell—he is here this evening," replied Sariann, "and—to my great satisfaction, for you know I am never comfortable with strangers—was deputed to take me in to dinner."

"Oh, how fortunate you were! George Bell is such a pleasant person. My escort was an old gourmand, whose whole conversation ran on the detestable subjects of eating, drinking, and cookery, just varied a little at the conclusion by the equally interesting topic of the mercenary character of man."

Sariann laughed merrily.

"Poor Enny! and so little as you care

for eating of any kind, or for money either ! ”

Near us stood an exquisite malachite table, strewn over with elegant knicknacks, among which was a richly embossed portfolio. While thus chatting Lady Elizabeth Bristow sauntered towards us and began turning over the contents of the latter. Presently she stopped, and uttered an exclamation of delighted surprise, looking at me, and again at the something in her hand which had astonished her.

“ This is an admirable, a wonderfully good likeness of you,” she said ; “ may I ask who was the painter ? ”

“ Of me ? ” I answered, in amazement, jumping up to inspect the picture. “ I had no idea I occupied a corner in that beautiful portfolio, nor have I a notion how I got there.”

“ Is it possible ? ” Not know how it got there ? ” replied Lady Elizabeth, her small, keen black eyes scanning my face doubtfully. She spoke in low, cooing accents, unnaturally soft, I thought, contrasted with the determined, hard style of her features and general expression, which seemed curiously at variance with such purring tones.

"No, indeed I do not," I rejoined, colouring under her look of suspicion; "I have not the faintest idea where it came from, or why it was considered worth putting in there."

Lady Elizabeth smiled. Her smile, like her voice, was particularly sweet and agreeable, but, like her voice, a contradiction to her other personalities.

"Oh," she cooed, "you surely would not think it misplaced if it even lay on the table of royalty! Do you not agree with me?" smilingly addressing Sariann.

"I have not seen the painting, and therefore cannot say," she replied, rising and coming to my side, the grave honest tones of her voice contrasting oddly with those of Lady Elizabeth. "Yes, I do quite agree with you," she continued, warmly; "the likeness is perfect; I never saw anything more beautiful—so beautiful. It is of course the one lately taken of you, dear?" rejoined Sariann, hesitating slightly, and turning to me.

"Ye-s, I—I suppose it is."

I too felt apprehensive of committing myself, not knowing how far Lady Elizabeth had been enlightened concerning Gurty, or if at all.

Looking up I found the former watching us both, a sharp, suspicious expression glittering in her eyes.

“This is quite a recent likeness, then? I thought it was,” she observed, quietly, but with a kind of metallic ring in the tone she was unable to repress or was unconscious of.

“Y-es, it has been taken rather lately,” I stammered.

To my exceeding relief, Monica came to the rescue, flitting close to me, exclaiming,—

“How do you do, Enny? How is grand-mamma?” peeping over my shoulder the while, and continuing, without waiting for an answer. “I am curious to know what it is you are all plotting about. Oh! why, that’s *you!* What a capital likeness! The very image of you! Who has it been painted for?” her sparkling, mischievous eyes glancing up sideways, in a fashion peculiar to herself, into my disconcerted face.

“You should not allow that wild little tongue of yours such unbridled liberty,” interposed Sariann. “It was painted for Lady Frances, at her request, and belongs to her.”

Monica laughed incredulously.

“Was it so? *bien!* I am quite sure you think that, for you are truth itself, my good mistress; *mais nous verrons!*”

“‘*Nous verrons!*’! what did she mean by that? Her wicked little head is always plotting or imagining something which no one else sees,” thought I, “and which, just as often as not, has no existence but in her prolific brain.”

Presently Lady Elizabeth sat down, and we all three followed her example, forming a circle round the malachite table. She resumed her examination of the portfolio, and, while chatting with Sariann and Monica of this thing and that, I, unperceived, scrutinized the personal appearance of the future Duchess of Riversdale.

In figure she was short, plump, well rounded, and fairly well formed, which latter advantage she was at no pains to conceal, inasmuch as, besides the most limited display of drapery the fashion sanctioned, the sleeves of her dress were cut higher and the body lower than any I had seen before in my quiet life.

Monica Dormer was sometimes considered to run rather into extremes on these points; but, seen together, no comparison could be formed

between them. Lady Elizabeth's hair was dark almost to blackness, and coarse in texture, her skin of a dusky paleness; low, square forehead, short, hard, straight nose, thin-lipped, tight-shut mouth, disclosing, when she smiled, small, regular, beautifully white teeth.

"Can you tell me whose portrait this is?" she asked, suddenly looking up and catching me at my physiognomical investigation. It seemed to please her, however, for, handing the drawing across the table to me, she smiled good humouredly, with an evident feeling of satisfaction.

The painting now attracting her attention was of the same size and style of execution as my own, and was, I saw at once, the wonderful work of the same artist—Lady Gurty. It was that of a singularly handsome man—handsomer than any one I had ever seen. His head, forehead, and general countenance were perfectly godlike in their beauty of form and expression—full of all the noblest attributes of a good man—benevolence, humanity, bravery, honour, and a gentle, compassionate nature. The eyes, which were very powerful, had been marvelously portrayed—windows to a fathomless

depth of intellect, and beaming with sympathy and tenderness. Who could the original be? No ordinary character, I felt quite sure.

"No, I cannot tell you," replied I, after a few minutes of silent admiration. "I too should like exceedingly to know," I added, looking round for Lady Frances, but she was in conversation with a party at the far end of the room.

"What a wonderfully good-looking man!" I continued, resuming my fascinated examination of the portrait, and secretly beginning to think it was a fancy production of Gurty's.

"Hyacinth, who is this intended for?" questioned Lady Elizabeth, as the latter was passing near.

She stopped, and I gave her the picture.

"This? Oh—this is—yes—this is the likeness of—of Count Mentonez. At least, I believe it is—I mean (how stupid I am!) I *know* it is," corrected Lady Cintha, reddening. "He was an old friend of ours abroad—a particular friend." Her discomfiture was obvious to us all: clearly the handsome count occupied a prominent position in her heart, and Monica's bright eyes flashed between their thick black

lashes with suppressed merriment as she watched her.

“Of course he is a foreigner, and equally of course very poor,” remarked Lady Elizabeth, a meaning smile playing over her face—a smile that said sweetly, “I understand the matter perfectly.”

“Why, ‘of course’ very poor?” asked Hyacinth, firmly.

“Why? Because, as a rule, foreigners always are poor, you know, dear, and for that reason glad, when opportunity offers, to marry English ladies possessed of a little money,” replied Lady Elizabeth, striving to seem wholly innocent of any motive in her words; but some motive was there, for I detected it in the sparkle in her half-averted eyes.

“That they are as a *rule* poorer than, on an average, Englishmen are, is a state of things which, long resident as I have been abroad, I certainly was not aware of; nor of their predilection for British heiresses in preference to their own countrywomen. Be that as it may, however,” continued Lady Hyacinth, with increasing warmth, “Count Mentonez is a decided exception; he is as wealthy as he is

good looking, which I think all must agree is saying more than enough."

Laying the drawing on the table she walked haughtily away.

Lady Elizabeth looked slightly annoyed at this unexpected display of irritation on the part of her friend; she made a half-movement and gesture as though prompted to recall her and apologize. But just then, as Lord Riphon, who with another gentleman had entered the room, came at once towards us and commenced an animated conversation, the amused Lady Elizabeth quickly forgot her conciliatory intentions.

Sariann and I entertained ourselves inspecting the contents of the portfolio, but chatty little Monica joined Lord Riphon and Lady Elizabeth. She looked more than usually sparkling and pretty this evening, and her white book-muslin and cherry-coloured ribbons enhanced these charms greatly. Not at all surprised was I that she rapidly gained upon the great heiress in an unmistakable monopoly of Lord Frederick's attentions. That such neglect was highly offensive to the fortune-favoured lady was betrayed in the altered tone

of her voice and cynical style of her remarks when she spoke. Now either Monica detected the jealous feeling and was amused by it, or she was unconscious of its existence, for in no way did she alter, unless to become, if possible, more piquante and gay in her reception of every little dart fired at her.

“ Oh, I delight in croquet ! ” she was saying, enthusiastically ; “ do not you agree with me, Enny, that all outdoor amusements are infinitely preferable to indoor ? ”—Monica rarely waited for an answer ; “ and croquet is charming ! —there is always such fun, especially when one is getting the best of it and leaving an adversary hopelessly wandering about after his ball in some far-behind corner while you triumphantly finish up with a successful flourish against the wicket ! ”

I laughed.

“ The great disadvantage to outdoor pleasures,” observed Lord Riphon, “ and I confess I know of no other, is their being so defencelessly at the mercy of that most cheating, capricious, and remorseless of tyrants, the weather.”

“ Ah, yes,” laughed Monica ; “ but, for all

that and for all this, outdoor sports for me, sir ! ”

“ You do not see, Lord Frederick, that the one disadvantage you name is more than counterbalanced by the greatest of all advantages—flirting,” observed Lady Elizabeth, a bitter-sweet smile shimmering round her thin lips. “ Firting does not, cannot, in fact, enjoy half the freedom indoors, subject, as it must be, to constant close observation, as it does when at full liberty, uncontrolled and unseen, amid garden retirements, woodland glades, and shady lanes.”

Not in the slightest degree disconcerted was my self-possessed little friend.

“ Exactly, Lady Elizabeth ; that is precisely my view of the matter, and is it not yours too ? ” smiling wickedly,—“ world-wide enjoyment ; for what a poor spiritless thing flirtation is when under a tight rein !—is it not, Lord Rippon ? ” with a bewitching glance.

“ Yes, Miss Dormer,” he replied, evasively. “ I quite agree with you that a flirtation between kindred spirits adds immensely to the flavour of every pleasurable entertainment, particularly out of doors ; but the acting parties must be kindred spirits.”

The emphasized tones of his voice made me look at him. His big eyes were fixed steadfastly on my face, as though to declare, "*There dwells my kindred spirit.*" Colouring hotly, I turned away, but caught sight of Monica staring at us both with an expression of mortification in her countenance that perplexed and surprised me.

"Kindred spirits," repeated Lady Elizabeth, laughing lightly. "I see—Miss Denzell and Lord Riphon? But so many would feel disposed to place themselves on the like footing of equality, there would inevitably be such a host of candidates for so delightful a kindred companionship that I fear your flirtation would take more the character of a stoutly contested election than the mere agreeable flavouring of an out-door entertainment."

"So you see you had better be more humble in your flirting aspirations, Lord Frederick, and content yourself with me or with Lady Elizabeth Bristow," interrupted Monica, laughing a little ironically, I thought.

More gentlemen lounged in from the dining-room, among whom was the marquis; and Lady Elizabeth, smiling to herself, rose and,

without further answer, sailed across the room and joined Lady Hyacinth.

"I am glad you are gone, my leddy," said Monica, gaily nodding her pretty head at her retiring form; "you are not an amiable woman, and I do not like you. You have never known the pleasure and power of beauty, and have lost your youth, if you ever were young. But my belief is some people come into the world with grown-up minds and old, already used-up hearts in a previous state of existence; and that I am sure is your case, and therefore it is you are spitefully jealous of every pretty girl, and—"

"Lady Elizabeth looks older than she really is," interposed Lord Riphon, with an earnestness that was little in accordance with the indifference, the even neglect, he had just shown her; "and though not beautiful—"

"I should think not!" laughed Monica.

"—She is not destitute of a certain amount of good looks, either."

"In my opinion she is disagreeably plain," persisted Nica.

"Do you two ladies consider her so?" questioned Lord Frederick, turning to Sariann and me.

"No; on the contrary, I think she would be handsome, were it not for the prevailing expression of her countenance which requires softening," replied Sariann.

"Yes; that is my opinion too," I rejoined.

"Three against you, Miss Dormer! You must consider yourself beaten," exclaimed the gentleman, cheerfully.

"I declare I am half inclined to believe you are in love with that—that uninteresting old maid, Lord Riphon!" retorted Monica, in a very decided tone of irritation she seemed unable to control; "you would hardly take the trouble—you of all men—to advocate her cause so warmly if you were not."

"No," he replied, smiling gravely, "I am not in the least degree in love with Lady Elizabeth; I am simply doing her the justice I would any woman—perhaps the more willingly because a long-standing friendship demands it of me; and although not in love with her myself, or ever likely to be, I think there are others who might do worse in the matrimonial line than take to themselves so richly dowered a wife as Lady Elizabeth Bristow."

I could not help wondering whether the

marquis, who was lingering with some friends near the open door, would confer his personality on her and her party; for by the position she had chosen immediately he came in, and the expectant looks directed to where he stood, it was clear she fully anticipated his doing so.

Presently he sauntered up the room very deliberately, with his fingers in his waistcoat pockets, and stopped a few minutes beside Lady Elizabeth's chair. She made a movement to allow of his sitting down near her, which act of politeness he affected not to see, and very soon continuing his progress he joined our lively circle round the malachite table, and seated himself on the chair just vacated by Lady Elizabeth. I felt sure that wicked little Monica's siren glances of invitation had lured him as he was passing, for she became in rapturous spirits, secretly delighted, as she afterwards told me, at this, the noble Reginald's desertion of his "*old intended*."

"We have been having a conversation on the subject of flirting," she began. "Now what is your opinion? Your brother declares that it must be carried on between *kindred* spirits, or it is worth nothing."

“Kindred spirits!” interposed the marquis, sarcastically, “what in the name of wonder can such a bookworm as you know about flirting, Frederick? *Very* little, I should judge.”

“Very little, as you say,” rejoined his brother, looking at me with a quiet, amused rise of his eyebrows; “so little, in fact, that if ever betrayed into a serious performance of that kind it will be no passing fancy moves me.”

Captain Bell joined our party, which for dear Sariann’s sake I was glad of; and, soon after, the good-natured, merry old duke.

Altogether we had a very pleasant evening—I know I had, at least—and the others certainly seemed to have one too.

CHAPTER XVI.

EXTRACTS FROM SARIANN'S DIARY.

I HAVE just returned from a visit to the Castle with Ennis, who wished me to accompany her. Also, under stipulations of secrecy, I have, for the first time, been admitted to the prison apartments of the youngest daughter.

Verily, never looked I on aught so sad, so dreadful, as is this poor afflicted child !

Albeit afflicted in the full sense of the word, she is not ; no—for every comfort, every luxury, yea, and every pleasure she is capable of enjoying is allowed her, as far as is compatible with prudence and circumstances generally. But, above all, mercifully has her soul been dealt with, in that it has been spared all knowledge, all consciousness, of her deformed appearance.

Has she an understanding mind? a mind that can open to a perception of divine things—of those joys awaiting her in another world—of that comeliness being hers the which she does so admire in sweet Ennis? Oh, how oftentimes these questions stirred my heart while watching her, as intently she scanned Ennis Denzell's beauteous face, and transmitted its loveliness to her cardboard with such a wondrous skilful hand!

This was to be the final sitting, and Lord Rippon and Lady Frances were both present. The first made show to be reading, albeit, for the most part, he gazed furtively over the top of his book at Ennis, the which she could not fail to sometimes see, but verily he seemed not to care if she did.

He hath a long, lean, pale face, this young man, a large portion whereof is monopolized by as big a pair of black eyes as was ever framed in a human countenance. Methought, it is a clever and a kindly face, albeit deficient in "something,"—a "something" it much needeth to impart into it a nobler expression. Ere we parted, I knew—aye, and grieved o'er—the want of that "something."

Gurty does not dislike this brother; he is gravely gentle unto her, the which manner seems most agreeable to her silent, serious nature. His presence does not distress or hinder her in any little pleasure, as (so they tell me) does the presence of the marquis and Lady Hyacinth.

The former was standing without the huge gates smoking a cigar when we came down. Casting the objectionable thing from him upon seeing us, he said, courteously,—

“May I be allowed the honour of escorting you home, Miss Denzell?” He glanced defiantly and with an unholy, unbrotherly haughtiness at Lord Riphon as he spoke. Ah, that look told a tale only too easy to be read by one who loveth dear Ennis as I do! Methought, he is in love with her, and jealous of his brother’s intimacy with the sweet object of his affection. And thereupon a great fear suddenly possessed me that she might—nay, perchance did—return his love. Alas! I knew he was not worthy of her—no, not by a great, great deal; for what matter rank, wealth, looks, anything, unaccompanied by a love of God and His divine laws? And my poor brother. Ah

me! are his worst apprehensions to be thus soon, thus at once, verified concerning her? Is she, pure and taintless as a dewdrop, innocent as a little child, to be taken from her God-serving home and plunged into that hotbed of vanity? The very thought feels unto me like a return of that great bygone sorrow, the threatened death of our beloved Edith.

Can I, by any effort, stop the terrible evil? Methinks I will write and petition Charles to come home. She may possibly hearken to him. But, no, no, that will not do; for, if they already love each other (to wit, the marquis and Ennis), to bring upon her the opposition of one whom she knows to be a rival lover would but fan the fire into a vehement flame. Shall I talk to Lady Denzell? And suppose, after all, that I prove in the wrong—that no love exists betwixt the two young people—what a silly busybody should I appear unto them! No; I will wait awhile and see.

“Oh, yes, if you like the walk; for Sariann and I sent back the carriage as usual, preferring to return on foot,” replied Ennis, smiling, and in her modest manner blushing, in answer to the request of the young nobleman.

Lord Riphon also declared it his intention to accompany us, and, thus gallantly guarded, off we set.

At the first we proceeded abreast along the broad drive, a gentleman on either side Ennis, the younger brother being in the middle, next to me; for I, contrary to the amenities of society, was accorded an outside place by the two cavaliers. But what rules, what anything, influences a man when the coals of love are on fire in his heart? Verily, but for those grave and sad thoughts which persisted in keeping their hold in my mind I should have been greatly amused by the altered mien of the marquis. So dismissed from his tone and bearing was that supercilious condescension, that unconcealed expression of expectancy to be himself the entertained rather than the entertainer of those fair damsels whom he vouchsafed to honour with his slight notice, that scarce at all like unto his former self was he at this present. He has found out—aye, this young man so favoured of nature and fortune has found out—that it is possible a simple maiden, albeit inferior to himself in wealth and position, may be endowed with a magic power

that can set at nought all, yes, verily more than all, he could bring to bear against it,—aye, and make that all less than nothing, valueless, in the eyes of the possessor. By many efforts did Lord Riphon strive to draw to himself the attention of Ennis; howbeit his brother, though by no means as skilled in converse as he was, made up in quantity for quality, thereby leaving but spare time for the one to speak or the other to listen.

Rain has fallen of late, and without the park the ground was wet and dirty, and obliged a strict adherence to the pathway. Now here only two could walk together, and, so it befell, Lord Riphon and I, side by side, followed behind.

A bitter and gloomy expression darkened his features, betraying his jealous annoyance also at this fraternal rivalry; and so sorrowful did he become at the evident indifference of the beautiful Ennis as to who was her attendant that my foolish heart pitied him, and forthwith I commenced to talk briskly on divers matters to turn his thoughts. Howbeit a very divided attention and very abstracted answers I obtained, verily sometimes wholly irrelevant to

the subject; but with the damsel's sweet, bright voice sounding in his ears, her lithesome figure close before him, and her redundant glossy tresses mingling with the drooping feathers in her hat, how could it be otherwise?

Anon I spoke of Lady Gurty, her lamentable appearance, albeit her amiable nature and her wondrous talent for drawing.

Since that day another month has sped on its course, and, alas! a sore malady hath come upon our village! Yea, and it daily strengthens and spreads, and naught we can do, to wit all the servants of the Most High and lovers of the welfare, temporal and eternal, of their fellow-creatures, can stop its progress and ravages. At first its presence was small, and its effects mild, and readily it yielded to the loving treatment of anxious friends. Albeit the disease increased and increased; and now—ah me! it has, I fear, got beyond care and control. Irreligion, impiety, profanity, infidelity, these are the names given unto it.

My heart aches, and so do the hearts of all our good people, when we bethink us how wondrously free from such fearsome evil was our

sweet little village ere the arrival of this God-forgotten, world-loving family at the Castle, but more especially of their attendant suite of foreign and London servants.

Little thought I—verily, scarce thought my darling father—that so fast and wide and terrible would spread the infection of their sinful example among the simple ones of our hamlet. And even among the young sons and daughters of our gentry do I see and sorrow over the much-lamentable change.

Dora Bell, sensible, good, and firm, remains true to her God and her duty, and grieves with me over the fast-darkening scene. But not so Lucy: she is sadly altered. And thanks be to the Lord of all that He hath mercifully hearkened unto my prayers, and hitherto preserved unchanged—it seemeth to me even *untainted*—sweet, beauteous Ennis also! I would she were not so friendly with, or so much in the society of, Lady Frances, who, though, like her brother Frederick, of a kind and amiable nature, liveth, as, alas! do they all, without thought of another world; for said not Lord Rippon so? Ah! if thus they go on sleeping, what will be their awakening!

Happily, not to the pure ears of Ennis do they acknowledge their godless principles; nor doth Lady Denzell know aught of the real truth, the which ignorance my father doubts the rightfulness of allowing to continue, and whether it does not behove us to enlighten her thereon.

My greatest apprehension is the winning of Ennis Denzell's trustful heart by either one or other of the young Riversdale noblemen. Charles cannot bring himself yet to return home; but he has writ often to me letters full of painful forebodings on this matter, entreating that I would ceaselessly watch and guard her, and spare no effort to prevent her marrying into that, as he termeth them, objectionable family. Verily, the lovely maiden has her choice, or will have shortly; for—yes, so it is—both brothers love the very ground she treads; the elder, after his fashion and nature, proudly, condescendingly, not a doubt of success casting the faintest shadow over his progress, yet withal very devoted and watchful to please. Lord Frederick, humble and self-depreciating, with naught but a flickering light of hope to cheer

him on, obviously feels small confidence in his power or his chance of winning her affection in opposition to his more highly favoured brother.

But what is it the marquis means? For, while himself undisguisedly bestowing heart and soul upon Ennis Denzell, report—just as openly, nay, more openly—awards him to Lady Elizabeth. And nothing loth is the proud woman to wed him forthwith. The other evening, when with Ennis at the Castle, I could not but note with what angry eyes she marked his every attention to younger and more comely maidens than herself. Truly I wish her speedy success; for much better fitted is she to be his wife than is dear Ennis, with her child-like mind, her tenderly nurtured, loving heart, and her unworldly tastes and pleasures.

But I have wandered from my lament over the apostasy of our poor village, of the sowing of the tares whose growth hath been so rapid and already so destructive.

Dissatisfied with the humble life which rightly contented them before, many of our men and maidens have left their native place never, perchance, to return; aye, left it regard-

less of aged or infirm parents or helpless members of their families, whom formerly they gladsomely supported and cheered.

This morning was brought to me a message from Mary Dawkins, begging I would call and see her when I was out, for she was in sore trouble. Saying nought on the matter to my father, he being less well than usual, away I went.

Alas! poor woman! she had, indeed, fruitful cause for grief. Her husband, once so sober, fairly industrious, and loving to her and his children, hath taken to himself most lamentable habits of drinking, idleness, and roughness of temper towards his wife and offspring. And saith she, entreatingly, "Would I talk to him, and use my hitherto powerful influence to turn him from his evil ways, and save them all; for what was to become of them if he went on so? He has been consorting much of late with the duke's servants," she said, "especially with one of the young gentlemen's gentlemen," for so the simple rustics call the valets. "My husband, he did some work up at the Castle," continued Mary, "and there first knew

him; and after that they met at the public of an evening, for most of the duke's men-people, and of the visitors, goes to the New Inn, as 'tis named."

Readily I promised to do my utmost to help the unhappy wife, and, if possible, rescue her weak-charactered husband. Howbeit but faint hope of success cheered me; and now yet more bitterly heart-sore and heart-weary under the load of this fresh sorrow—for truly I am much attached to the poor Dawkins family—slowly wended my way home, pondering on the inscrutable, the mysterious course of Providence in His dealings with man.

While my disquieted soul ran this way and that, as it were seeking an outlet, and my unconscious body pursued its even course through a peaceful lane, I, at a sort of turn, met Lord Frederick Riphon. He walked, as is his wont, with depressed head, quick steps, and hand thrust into his coat-tail pocket. Like me, he, too, seemed buried in thought, and noted not my presence till we were quite near. His countenance was grave and full of trouble, and to that I imputed it that he perceived not my cold, discomfited manner; for verily I felt

wrathful against the whole family at that instant, and, for reasons of greater moment, more especially against himself, and therefore could not treat him with the friendliness of heretofore. Albeit he heeded me not, but, after a brief converse on trifling matters, saith he, in a mournful, abstracted tone,—

“If you will allow me the pleasure, Miss Beechley, I will accompany you part of your way,” and, awaiting not my answer, he turned, and again I resumed my homeward walk, Lord Riphon beside me. For a while we proceeded in silence; presently quoth he, in an unsteady, hesitating voice, “I am going to make a confession—though to one of your keen perceptions it is probably unnecessary; I will make it, however. And then—then I purpose entreating a favour of you; so great a favour that, if through your instrumentality the issue prove propitious to my wishes, will render me your grateful debtor for the rest of my life.”

At once the truth flashed into my already prepared mind: he wished to hire me, whom he knows she loves, and whose opinion she values and trusts,—to hire me to plead

his cause with Ennis Denzell and persuade her to become his wife.

He stopped speaking a brief space to bethink him how best to set forth his heart's request, and lacking patience in my then mood to await I said, gravely,—

“You are right, my lord, I do know what you would say on both points; and this is my answer. Sooner would I—yes, far, far rather—see my beloved adopted sister—for such in heart we are to each other—borne to her last resting-place in the churchyard than enter the church-doors to become your wife!”

He stared at me with a blank, white face.

“I know I am speaking strongly, perhaps unkindly,” I went on, more gently, for truly I felt pained at sight of his exceeding distress, “but I cannot help it: my whole being is full of grief and bitterness at the daily seeing and hearing of all the evil, the ruin, gathering in and around my sweet native village; and I know it is because of the sinful example, the horribly profane principles, they now see and hear, which are poisoning the morals of the poor, killing the souls of old and young of both sexes.”

My heart throbbed so tumultuously I was forced to cease speaking, and try to recover my composure somewhat; meanwhile hurriedly and in trembling accents spake Lord Riphon,—

“But why should you visit the blame of all this upon me? I have done nothing. I never speak to the common people; I have no occasion, you know, to do so,” he added, apologetically, remembering how in constant habit I was of holding converse with the poor villagers; also, indeed, did the sweet maiden whom he so ardently longed to call Lady Riphon.

“Never speak to the common people?” quoth I; “why, it was only the other day you held a long, yes, and a most sinful, wicked conversation with Robert Field, the blacksmith!”

He gave me an exceedingly startled look as thus I accused him; an expression of great shame came into his pale face, which suddenly suffused with crimson, but he did not answer, and bent his head lower than before.

“Field is a singularly pious, sensible, clever man for his position in life,” I resumed, “remarkable for his clear reasoning powers and forcible though rough eloquence, but,

above all, for his benevolent anxiety for the eternal welfare of his fellow-creatures. Now, I have no doubt you had heard of him, Lord Riphon—in so quiet a country place as this its little peculiarities assume an importance they could not in larger, more populous localities, and soon become generally known—and chancing to need some attention to one of your horses' shoes, you embraced the opportunity to stop, make acquaintance with the smith, and amuse yourself in endeavouring to undermine the faith and ruin the prospects, now and for ever, of this poor good man."

"You do speak strongly, Miss Beechley!" he rejoined, in a tone of keen and bitter annoyance; "but I suppose, like all your class of religionists, you consider that the end justifies the means, be the latter ever so much opposed to the spirit of those Christian principles of gentleness, humility, and forbearance you profess."

"If such were the case, which it is not," said I, "I should at least have the excuse of a good motive for my conduct. But what have you, Lord Frederick? Your brother is irreligious also," I continued; "but his deficiency

in that respect seems more the result of carelessness of character and want of reflection than of positive atheism, as in your case. He is as indifferent on the subject regarding others as himself. Not so you. *You* are actually proud, boastful, of your wretched, benighted principles. But," I added, quickly, "I wish not to enter into any argument on the subject, —my father would disapprove; moreover I possess neither intellect nor knowledge sufficient for such conflict. This I will say, however, and intreat of you that, whatever may be your own private opinions, you will at least mercifully keep them to yourself; that you will cease disseminating such pernicious sentiments among your fellow-creatures. I would implore you to abstain from doing so everywhere; but I beseech you to spare any further injury to this our little village. Ah me!" I exclaimed, again getting beyond control of myself, "look, look what human beings become who forsake and live without God and their Saviour! and see what they are, and ever have been, when under His acknowledged, prayed-for care and guidance! You cannot but have noted these direful or good, as the case was, results; and

ought not that to restrain you, if only from very humanity?"

We had now arrived unto the end of the lane, and were approaching my home. Hereat Lord Riphon stopped, and, looking earnestly into my face, saith he,—

"If I grant your request, will you in return do for me what I am going to ask? Will you say to Ennis Denzell that I love her?—love her fondly, passionately, better, ten thousand times better, than I love myself or the whole world besides!" The intensity of his feelings blanched his countenance to a deadly whiteness. "And tell me," he continued, breathing quick and hard, "tell me her answer. Tell me if there exists the slightest chance of success to my suit; if I might dare to hope that in time, if not now, she may be able to return my love. Will you do this for me, Miss Beechley? If you will, I declare to you on the honour of a gentleman that, fail or not, another word regarding religion shall never more pass my lips, here or elsewhere, that could offend your most sensitive, most rigidly strict principles."

I bethought me, then said,—

“Yes, I will. My granting or refusing your request will make no difference in the success or failure of your wishes, for, whether I aid you or not, you will equally carry out your intentions in some way or other. But understand me well, Lord Riphon, I only undertake to repeat your message to Ennis, and give you her answer.” In my heart I knew what that answer will be, but also I knew that had I desired to tell him, which I did not, it would have availed naught in deterring him in the prosecution of his wishes; for although he would not have misdoubted my belief in the truth of my words, he would the correctness of my judgment thereon. Albeit I could not bear he should think I would, under any circumstances, favour the suit of so godless a man, and said, “I will say nothing to influence her decision one way or the other; but if I find that she returns your affection—”

“Ah, that would be too great a happiness to be possible!” interrupted Lord Riphon, in low tones.

“If I find she returns your affection,” I repeated, “I shall then deem it my imperative duty to clearly enlighten her concerning your

religious principles, and also her grandmother, Lady Denzell."

A troubled, hesitating expression clouded his features at these words; albeit no anger was in the cloud; he seemed misdoubtful of the wisdom of trusting the management of his case in hands so uncompromising as mine,—whether it would not be best to conduct it himself.

"Your resolve does not surprise me," said he, presently; "it is nothing more than what I might have expected from you, and I would, because of it, withdraw my request, could I, by so doing, hinder your carrying it out. Under any circumstances, however, whether you or I lay the matter before her, and her answer be in the smallest measure favourable—favourable," he repeated, a perceptible thrill of rapture at the mere mention, the mere possibility, of so blessed a result vibrating through these latter words, "you will equally—for in truth you are at heart decidedly opposed to my marrying her—equally say all in your power to prejudice your beautiful friend against me; of this I feel certain."

"Excepting as regards your religious prin-

ciples I know nothing to say against you," replied I, gravely.

He stood silent for a minute, gazing thoughtfully on the ground, then said, abruptly,—

"If you will say nothing to injure my cause in Ennis Denzell's or her grandmother's estimation, if, on the contrary, you exert that influ—that—in short, if she becomes my wife, not only will I never again disparage religion to others, but neither will I, by word or deed, distress or offend the pious feelings of my sweet wife; so far from it, I will, for love of her and in gratitude to you, be in *seeming*, yes, and in practice, a Christian, though unable from opposing convictions to be so in soul. Will you promise me?"

"No, Lord Riphon," said I, unhesitatingly, "I cannot do that. We must not commit evil, even that good may come of it."

"I do not see in what the evil would consist," he made answer, and for the first time showing some irritable impatience of manner.

"Lying is but the intention to deceive," I said; "that which you propose would from first to last be an odious deception. Do not you see,

too, by that very proposal how utterly untrustworthy you are ? ”

“ Untrustworthy ? ” repeated he, reddening exceedingly.

“ Look here, Lord Frederick,” I answered gently, albeit firmly, “ how could I be sure but that, in like manner as you had on such vital points broken faith with Ennis, marrying her under false pretences, under an utterly false character (for that you know it would be), that you might not, should some strong or sudden temptation assail you, manage by means of a skilful subterfuge to slip through your promise to me, and deceive again, and this time with irretrievably direful consequences ? ”

The colour deepened yet more in his face, and in an awkward voice he retorted, glancing at me hastily, and anon turning him away,—

“ All stratagem is fair, they say, in love and war ; however, I will not attempt to argue the point with you, Miss Beechley, for I am convinced it would be useless, as, indeed, experience has taught me from boyhood argument of every kind is with ladies ; so, if you please, we will return to the first proposition.”

“Which is to tell Ennis of your liking for her,” I interposed, “ascertain her sentiments towards yourself, and report the same to you. In consideration of such favour on my part, you, on yours, promise to act as you first stated—and that independently of success or failure of your suit.”

“I trust you will not make so matter-of-fact, brief, and passionless a statement of the affair to Ennis Denzell as you have now done to me,” quoth he, smiling anxiously.

I, too, smiled, albeit but sadly, as did the young man, while I made answer,—

“No. Do you not remember I promised I would, to the best of my ability, deliver, verbatim, your declaration to Miss Denzell? Will not that be warm and passionate enough?”

“Passionate enough!” repeated he, sighing, “well—yes—I suppose it will do—if anything will! Were I to speak volumes, what more in meaning could it amount to than I have already said?—I love you, Ennis Denzell, with my whole heart and soul!”

Methought I should be sorry to have to listen to such volumes. Howbeit, I said naught further on the matter, but held forth my hand to

wish him good-bye, for, said I, I could not delay longer.

Still he lingered, seemingly heeding me not.

“‘Honesty is the *worst* policy’ is my view of the case,” said he, moodily. “Had I from the first concealed my religious opinions—”

“Which Satan, who skilfully works all the doings of his servants in order that they may abundantly promote the prosperity of his own interests, took good care you should not,” I interrupted.

“Thank you, fair lady,” said he, bowing ironically, and laughing, half amused, half offended; “to coolly tell a man he is a servant of that reputedly disreputable old gentleman, whose lawful name is prohibited in high society, is not complimentary, certainly.”

I laughed a little, and again proffered my hand. “I must go,” I urged; “my father is not so well to-day, and may require my assistance in many ways.”

He grasped my fingers with nervous warmth.

“When can I see you again? when will you see her—and learn my fate? Is this your usual walking-time?”

“Oh, no; I have generally home duties to

attend to in the morning—domestic matters to look to, of which you rich and great people know not even the names. No; call at the Rectory: let me see; to-day is Tuesday: well, call, if possible, on Friday morning, about twelve o'clock. I will, nothing preventing, be in the garden, and shall see you." And, bowing, I hurried away.

So it was: this next morning Ennis writ me a little note, the which Johnny ran over with; his blooming cheeks and sparkling eyes and breathless voice betraying an utter casting aside, when unseen, of that slowness and gravity of demeanour approved of by the worthy man, Jeffry.

Grandmamma (so said the note) had a slight cold, and purposed remaining at home to-day; would I accompany her in a drive, and return afterwards to their five o'clock tea?

To this convenient proposal I writ a willing acceptance, and at three o'clock the carriage was at the door, and away went Ennis and I. The vehicle is a barouche, which, with a fine pair of chestnut horses, Lady Denzell purchased for her adopted daughter on her seventeenth

birthday ; and well did the sweet maiden become the costly present.

I heard the carriage coming, and went down to the garden gate. Johnny was beside the coachman, and descended from the box with a lightsome, albeit subdued, activity and improved graveness of manner which certainly said a great deal in favour of Mr. Jeffry's mode of page-tuition ; but verily Ennis doth secretly amuse her merry spirit greatly thereat, and in all else concerning Johnny and his breaking-in at the hands of his punctilious master.

The weather is at present bright and dry, and very delightful for outdoor exercises. During the whole of August much rain fell, and the wind tossed the trees to and fro in a fearful way ; but September has brought a more peaceful spirit on the earth, and Riversdale is now rejoicing in the hope of a seasonable autumn.

While chatting of this thing and that, and mentally plotting how best to bring my Lord Rippon, of whom she seemed to have no thought, before Ennis, he, by exceeding good luck, himself threw open the door as it were, for at a junction of three roads we met him

on horseback. He started at sight of us, and the dark colour made a tumultuous rush over his pale face the while he raised his hat to bow. Albeit the interview was very brief, for doubtless, imagining his fate was just then pending, he sped on with nervous haste, and was past our carriage in a few minutes.

Thereupon I spake, and said I, that very opportunely had come this our drive, for so it was, I held a message for her from the gentleman who had now ridden by.

"A message?" quoth she; then, bethinking her quickly, added, "oh, I can guess; he wants a root of my beautiful rose. Well, if Graham approves, that is, if it will not injure the tree, he shall; but—"

"In a poetical, not a botanical, point of view you are right, dear," I interrupted. "Yes; *he* has sent *you* a rose, and entreats for one in return."

"Has he?" quoth she, still not taking in my meaning, and looking at my hands; "but where is it, Sariann? Did you forget to bring it? Was it very beautiful?"

"I did not admire or like it, dear; but I will describe it, and you shall judge for yourself," I

made answer; and forthwith delivered his message, as well as I was able, word for word, adding, "all this I was to say to you, and give him your answer to-morrow."

She kept silent a minute or two, the crimson colour burning in her checks, and a distressed expression contracting her features.

Presently said she, gravely, and in a low voice, as though it were a something that was bodily dangerous she spoke of,—

"He is an infidel, Sariann!—do you know that?"

"Yes, darling. Who told you?"

"Dear old Harry—Harry Dormer, you know. He told me quite lately, and begged me to be as little intimate with either Lord Rippon or his brother as possible. Nothing would satisfy him until I promised—which—which I did—because," blushing vehemently, "his mother was quite unhappy about me, he said."

"Ho! ho! that 's it, is it?" thought I, a mighty joy rushing into my heart. Howbeit the next instant a keen pang mingled therewith at recollection of poor life-blighted Charles. Still I am glad—I cannot help it—glad to my heart she loves young Dormer. I have known

him from a little lad—a bright, kind-hearted boy; and I now know him to be a right-thinking, noble, Christian-souled youth, as tender and humane of nature as he is brave, frank, and generous, and of a charming temper, albeit a little hot and hasty. Good, excellent people, too, are my Lord and Lady Dormer; and Harry is of the same mould as his father—an old man of as fine and comely a mind as person.

Ofttimes I regret the family are not of our parish—that their example and influence are too distant to work beneficial effects upon poor little Riversdale, and thus help counteract the fast-strengthening evils within and around it.

“And did you not see that Lord Riphon loves you, dear?” quoth I.

“No; and oh, Sariann, I am very sorry, for, though I do not actually love him, I like him. I like his society, his conversation and manners; nobody can help doing that, I think—don’t you, dear Sariann?—but I do not love him; and thank God that I do not! What possesses him to love me, I wonder?” questioned the sweet thing, looking thoughtfully perplexed. “I have not given him the slightest encourage

ment; nor has he—which puzzles me yet more—ever (that I was at all aware of at least) acted the part of a lover to me. I am sure if he had I should have immediately taken fright. Dear me! dear me!” she exclaimed, impatiently, her eyes filling with tears as she bethought her of poor Charles, “why will these melancholy people fall in love with me to whose nature and disposition ‘il penseroso’ is a perfect stranger. Love him! why, if I felt such a weak, wicked sensation trying to creep into my heart, wouldn’t I shut the door against it, and lock and bolt to any extent! Yes; and if all that proved insufficient, I would confess to grandmamma, and get her to take me away before love had discovered the penetrable parts of the citadel, and until I had learned to forget him.”

Methought, I am truly thankful no such grievous temptation assails thee, my darling. My Lord Riphon hath a most eloquent tongue and a soft, guileful address—a combination far more potent in its effects on women than are the most comely looks. Ah! I fear me thy loving young heart would have small chance against such a siege!

“Well,” said I, presently, “I will tell him, with all gentleness and consideration, that his case is hopeless; and now let me know how does the marquis submit to your lately curtailed visits to the Castle? I suppose that is the result of Lady Dormer’s anxiety about you?”

I turned aside my head to conceal the smile I could not suppress at utterance of the last words. But she noted it not, poor child; her tender spirit was distressing itself over Lord Riphon’s misplaced affection, and her look and voice were abstracted as she made answer slowly, and with a ring of sadness in it which, for divers reasons, I like not to hear,—

“To the Castle? Yes—no—that is, I have not been there so frequently within the last month.”

“And how does the noble Reginald like that?”

“Well, no better than Frederick does; but he shows his annoyance in a different way. Of course they find it dull in the country after the gay life they have lived in Paris and elsewhere, and are glad to collect as many young people about the Castle as possible, and thankful, therefore, for the society of even poor stupid me.

I am certain, at least, that is the elder brother's feeling, for he makes no pretence of being otherwise than offended at my absence and constant refusals of their invitations. Lady Hyacinth also shares in his indignation at the little value evidently attached to their royal condescension by the simple rustic; but poor gentle Lord Frederick is only grieved and puzzled."

"And Lady Frances?" quoth I.

"I scarcely know what she feels," replied Ennis. "She is not offended, certainly; but sometimes I think she seems a little hurt by my unexplained, or at any rate unsatisfactory, rejection of their civilities."

"Perhaps so," rejoined I.

"The fact is, you know, Sariann, dear Har—Lady Dormer, I mean—is unnecessarily anxious on the point; for whatever the Riversdale principles may be, they never, as I told him, talk of them in company. Talk on religious subjects! why they are all too light, pleasure-loving, and thoughtless to seriously cumber their minds for one moment with any such weighty matter."

"How goes on the engagement between the

marquis and Lady Elizabeth Bristow?" said I, after a few further remarks touching the defilement consequent upon any contact with pitch, and a justifying on my part of Lady Dormer's Christian anxiety; "that is," I added, "if such an engagement does, or ever did, exist between them."

"Just the question I asked Frances; and she said no—no actual engagement had been formed between them yet, and she hoped there never will, for she exceedingly disliked Lady Elizabeth; the very sound of her treacherous voice was repugnant to her, she said;" and Ennis laughed at the idea.

"Yes; and intimate though the family are with her," I replied, "they do not seem to have allowed her an entrance into the skeleton closet, as they have us, nor to have favoured her with any different account of poor little Gurty to that given generally."

"Ah, I see she has been trying to tamper with you as she did with me," answered Ennis, "speaking pityingly of the poor *idiot* child, and commiserating the duke and duchess for having so heavy an affliction to bear. These and many other remarks were always made at

chance moments when we happened to be alone, and were delivered or asked in low, mysterious tones, and a suspicious questioning expression in her eyes and the lines of her mouth."

"I hope, for their sakes, she will not discover the family secret," said I. "Yes, she has talked in the same inquisitive way to me. It is the safest way, under such circumstances, to answer only 'Yes' and 'No'; and to that I adhered, for, should she ever obtain a sight of that poor child, the Riversdales will have a dangerous enemy in Lady Elizabeth, should they seriously anger her; I fear so, at least."

"That they will," rejoined Ennis. "I can see by her look and manner, quiet, composed, and apparently unobservant though she is when speaking to me on the subject, that mentally she is always peeping into Gurty's prison-room; and if they are not sharply guarded with her she will ascertain, by ocular demonstration, whether there does not lie hidden within its locked doors a something more curious and horrible than a mere commonplace idiot, secluded from the world because scared at the sight of strangers."

“What a singularly mean prying nature she must possess!” said I, indignantly. I could not suppress my disgust. “She ought not to even *wish* to know more of people’s private concerns than they are willing she should be acquainted with; but to endeavour to obtain such knowledge by a forced intrusion, by any underhand, dishonourable device,—oh, I am certain the poorest Christian woman in our village would be incapable of conduct so mean!”

“I feel sure she would,” said Ennis; adding, —“the other day I was greatly perplexed in what way to safely answer Lady Elizabeth. She assumes, you know, Sariann, to be rather partial to my society, and in truth I like her too as an acquaintance—she is a remarkably agreeable, sensible woman; well, we were walking together on the terrace before the Castle, waiting for Lady Hyacinth and Frances, who were dressing, to come out and take a stroll through the park with us, when suddenly Lady Elizabeth said,—

“‘Is the youngest child a boy or girl, Miss Denzell?’

“‘A girl,’ replied I, hiding my face by pretending to look at something over the side of

the terrace. I felt certain she perfectly well knew which it was, and this was only an opening question to more.

“ ‘ Oh, indeed! a girl. What is its name? for really they make such an unnecessary mystery of the whole affair I never like speaking to them on the subject.’ ”

“ She said this in an accent so different to her usually soft voice, it was so full of a contemptuous impatience, that I unvoluntarily glanced at her with surprise; upon which she immediately softened down, saying, ‘ I do so exceedingly dislike deception of every kind—do not you?—my whole nature is morally antagonistic to it; but, as I was asking, do you know its name? and how old is it? Pray tell me all you know about this mystery, for I confess I am very curious to hear.’ ”

“ You may imagine, dear Sariann, how uncomfortable I felt at being thus thrust into a corner; for having, I hope, as strong a moral antipathy to all that is false as Lady Elizabeth, I was painfully troubled how best to steer between the two sins—positive untruth and breach of promise of secrecy and a betraying of the trust so freely confided in me.”

“It was indeed a most distressing position to be placed in, dear,” saith I; “how did you manage to escape?”

“Well, I had just resolved, after the manner of most timid animals when brought to bay, to turn upon my pursuer,—tell her, in fact, that I possessed no right or wish to speak on any subject which friends far more intimate than I was thought proper to withhold from her knowledge, and that she must forgive me for positively refusing to say a word more about it.”

“Quite right, dear,” I said. “That would have been the most sensible and proper thing you could say.”

“Perhaps, however, it is better I did not,” continued Ennis. “I should certainly have offended and very probably made her dislike me, which I should be sorry for; so, luckily, at that moment the marquis came out and joined us in our walk, and so put a stop to our disagreeable conversation. He glanced searchingly into our faces as he approached, and said, doubtfully,—

“‘What can you have been talking about? You both look as grave and wise as a couple

of cabinet ministers canvassing some knotty point involving the fate of nations.'

"I cannot imagine what he thought had been the subject of discussion; but a marked tone of suspicion rang in his words, and he watched me for the answer. I pretended to be quite indifferent, and remained silent; and as we were just then turning at one end of the terrace, Lady Elizabeth adroitly stepped between the marquis and me, and said, in her silvery voice, smiling,—

" 'We were just having a most interesting talk about your youngest sister. I was asking her age and other questions, poor little creature; for though we have all long been friends—intimate friends,' and again she smiled sweetly upon the noble Reginald, "I am ashamed to confess that I have never thought of the matter till to-day, when Miss Denzell and I began speculating concerning her.'

"I was, as you may suppose, greatly annoyed at this speech, which seemed to imply that I had been the originator of a conversation about Gurty. I was amazed, too, at its general untruthfulness. However, it comforted me somewhat to see by the expression in the

gentleman's face that he strongly suspected the case lay more with Lady Elizabeth than with me. I know I felt very angry, and have no doubt I looked so, and to some extent guilty. He glanced keenly at me as he said, in a cold tone,—

“‘I should have thought so pleasant and balmy a day as this might have suggested a more cheerful topic for discussion than the age, &c., of a poor idiot.’

“‘Do you think so?’ she replied. ‘Well, now do you know it was exactly all that which brought her to my mind. Poor creature!’ she added, commiseratingly, ‘poor little Lady Guernsey! I think Hyacinth told me that is her name, is it not?’ looking at the marquis.

“‘Oh, Lady Elizabeth!’ I blurted out, more indignantly than politeness allowed, ‘you told me you did not know her name; that you did not know even whether it was a boy or girl!’

“‘No, dear; you forget,’ she rejoined, her suave voice and manner contrasting very unfavourably, I felt, with my blunt speech. ‘It was not her *name* we were discussing when the marquis came up, but her *age*, if you remember rightly.’

“I could not contradict her; I had been rude enough already. Besides, in the confusion of the moment I thought it possible I really had been mistaken; and only when my scattered ideas formed again into working order did I recall correctly what had passed between us prior to the arrival of the marquis.”

Said I, gravely,—

“You must take the earliest opportunity, dear, to explain the case to Lady Frances. Not for worlds would I have her think you had broken your word, and betrayed the confidence she so trustfully reposed in you.”

“Dear Sariann, do you think I waited?” quoth the dear child, eagerly; “not I. That was just my feeling; and, wild with impatience, I never rested until I told her that same day, word for word, of all that Lady Elizabeth and I said to each other on the subject. And little it was to tell after all.”

“Yes,” I said, “thanks to your good principles, good feeling, and good sense.”

“When the two girls joined us (it always astonishes me the time they take to dress merely to walk in the country), when at last

they came, however, the marquis turned to leave us and go back to the house. Lady Elizabeth and Hyacinth were walking on; but the first instantly stopped, saying, in a surprised, annoyed voice,—

“‘Are you not coming with us?’

“‘No, I think not; not at present at least. I may follow you by-and-by,’ he replied, carelessly.

“‘You had better come now,’ persisted the lady, smiling persuasively; but he did not answer, and I had never seen him look so gloomy and out of temper. He glanced at me when passing in that disagreeable, supercilious way he has sometimes, but which he had quite discarded lately in his intercourse with me; and my vexation increased at this evidence, I thought, of his changed opinion of my character.”

“I do not wonder at you, dear,” said I.

“It was so unpleasant to me that what do you think I did, Sariann? I actually imitated Lady Elizabeth, and, smiling (with a good deal of rustic bashfulness, I am afraid), said very amiably, ‘Will you not take pity upon us and come? Four ladies! think of that! not one

gentleman to keep the peace. Oh, you cannot refuse!’

“He stopped instantly on hearing this pathetic appeal, and looked irresolute and actually astonished; and—yes—I assure you it was no delusion of my vanity—a deep flush spread over his haughty face, while the before objectionable expression left it entirely. Then he glanced after Lady Elizabeth, who, with Lady Hyacinth, was already some distance on the road, then at Frances, who laughed but said nothing; finally he again turned, saying in a tone wondrously unlike his own—it was a perfectly natural, an ashamed voice, in fact,—

“‘Well, yes, it would be a pity to spend such a morning as this in-doors, certainly; therefore I cannot do better than practise the humanity you suggest, Miss Denzell, and act the part of a counter-irritant between you four ladies.’

“‘Oh, Reggie! Reggie!’ laughed Lady Frances, as we walked on, adding in Italian, in a lower tone, which of course she thought the simple rustic did not understand, ‘your case is becoming hopeless. I see it! I see it!—utterly, utterly hopeless! Poor Marquis of

Belford! But take care—*that* won't do for you you know.'

"'Do not talk nonsense, Fanny!' growled the poor marquis, in the same language.

"'Well, one thing I am quite certain of,' rejoined his sister, gaily; 'you might go further and fare worse.'

"'A very short distance further too—just a few yards in front, for example.'

"'Oh! you have come to that conclusion, have you?'

"'If you are intending to talk secrets, be guarded what you say,' I interposed, also speaking in Italian, but not by any means with their fluency.

"The marquis involuntarily exclaimed, 'Oh!'

"Lady Fanny laughed a little, and reddened a good deal, saying,—

"'I feel very much ashamed of myself, dear Ennis; not for what I said—they were merely harmless jokes, but for being so rude as to talk in a language I thought you did not understand: why, it was every bit as bad as whispering. I do not blame *you*, Reggie,' she added in her before merry, bantering tone, 'but I have nothing to say for myself.'

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ The woman beguiled me and I did eat ’ is sufficient excuse for any man,’ rejoined the brother : ‘ the fault was entirely yours, Lady Fanny, as you had the honesty to imply, if not acknowledge, and—’

“ At this instant Lady Elizabeth looked round, then stopped and watched our approach. There was a glitter in her eyes that imparted a strangely unpleasant, cruel expression to her face, I thought.

“ ‘ Oh, then, you changed your mind, and have come after all ? ’ she said, smiling.

“ ‘ It seems like it, does it not ? ’ replied her lover, with easy indifference, and the old objectionable look and manner returning strong upon him. Lady Elizabeth shot a keen glance at me, that made me feel guilty and uncomfortable, though why I could not tell. We all then moved on, a general silence prevailing for some minutes, which was broken by Lady Hyacinth’s calling upon her brother to explain a matter that had, she said, been sorely perplexing her own and Elizabeth’s minds. She fell back while speaking, and, our party thus becoming mixed, I walked apart with Frances, and then it was I told her what had passed

between Lady Elizabeth Bristow and myself.

“ ‘She evidently does not believe the account you have given her of Gurty,’ I continued, ‘and shrewdly suspects that far more, and different, lies concealed than you choose to make known. I tell you this, in case you do not wish her to be further enlightened; for Lady Elizabeth is sensible and pleasant, but I think can be, and probably would be, very dangerous if mortally offended.’

“ ‘You are quite right,’ replied Francis, thoughtfully; ‘and it annoys us all exceedingly that Belford continues trifling with her affection for him. She loves him, and takes no pains to hide that she does so; but lately, I can’t think why, he has conceived a positive hatred to her.’ ”

Said I, “I do not see how, if they are only commonly prudent, Lady Elizabeth can discover anything concerning Gurty. A woman in her position of life is not likely nor able to do much in that way.”

“Those were almost my very words,” rejoined Ennis; “but Frances was of a different opinion. ‘She should be very sorry,’ she said,

‘to trust to that in Elizabeth’s case’; adding, ‘Dr. Carlinez particularly warned us to try, as well as we could, and suppress all suspicion: it was our best chance of concealment of the real truth; and when saying that I know he alluded to Elizabeth, whom he never liked.’”

Before my drive with Ennis ended, we settled it between us that, according to mine own judgment, I was to make known to Lord Riphon her refusal of his offer. Thereupon I lingered in the Rectory garden on Thursday morning, as agreed ’twixt himself and me.

Ere I expected him the anxious lover came. He rode thither, and, leaving his horse tied without the garden-gate, hastened forward to shake hands. So exceedingly nervous was he—now white, anon red, then white again, and his usually pleasant-toned voice so thick and trembling—that I could not help pitying him. Truly I felt, in no small degree, off mine own ease, and perplexed what first to say, as was also my Lord Riphon. So we talked with much gravity of the state of the weather, its variable moods of late, and possible injury to crop-sowing, &c., as if that oft-used subject was the one we had

met to particularly discuss. Presently, with sudden, desperate plunge, saith he,—

“Miss Beechley, this conversation is but a mere farce; I can wait no longer. For pity's sake end my uncertainty one way or other, and at once. Does she—will she—love me now or ever?”

Said I, hurriedly, and seating myself on a bench at the far end of the garden,—

“Let us sit down here.”

He was so tall and thin, and was becoming so ghastly white, and so shaky and excited, perchance I was over nervous, but I really feared and shrank from too hastily adding to his already great distress by my hope-destroying announcement, and thereupon strove to make a little delay, thinking that the doing so might let in a portion of the bitter truth ere opening out the whole to him.

In a quick, abstracted manner, and evidently scarcely conscious of what he did, he sat him down, his great, speaking eyes gazing and striving to read his fate in my troubled countenance. Every expression, yea, every movement, told of the strong love for Ennis Denzell overpowering this man's whole being. Howbeit, I said, gently,—

“My answer will be brief; for were I to talk till to-morrow it would, in the end, amount in meaning to but simply this. Ennis Denzell grieves, with all a tender-hearted maiden’s sorrow, that you should have encouraged a passion for her she can *never* return. You are agreeable and clever, she said, and she likes you with the liking of a friend—nothing more. But, Lord Riphon, I will tell you, because I trust and hope it may do you good, somewhat more than that she said, for my ear only; and by-and-by she shall know I did so. Ennis added, in her straightforward, earnest way, ‘I do not love him, Sariann; I do not wish to do so. On the contrary, if I *thought* even that any such weak feeling was coming into my heart I should detest myself, and determinedly struggle against it. I would beg grandmamma to take me away somewhere until I had completely subdued every sensation of the kind.’ ”

He clasped his long thin hands together convulsively, from such intense mental pain that his skin became of so ghastly a grey white I could not bear to look at him, and thereupon

averted my face. Presently said he, in a low bitter tone,—

“I presume the ‘weak feeling’ owes its origin to your flattering opinion of me, Miss Beechley,—and which opinion has been successfully instilled into her mind from the first?”

“No; pardon me, but it was not,” said I, gently, compassionating in my heart the evident agony of grief he was in, and the which his emaciated frame and delicate constitution were so little able to bear. “Neither advice, enlightenment, nor warning was demanded of me. I do not deny that, had they been, most assuredly, unhesitatingly, I would have given them; but they were not. Some one else told her everything necessary concerning your unhappy principles.”

Ere I finished speaking, he seemed neither to heed my speech nor my presence, but sat gazing abstractedly before him, one nervous hand clasped over his knee, the other grasping the arm of the bench; then in a sort of dreary soliloquy, and in allusion to my last words, he said,—

“Unhappy, indeed, if they have done *this*

for me ! And I think they have. Yes, angel though she is, I think I could have made her love me. But it is too late now !—too late ! I could not stand a second failure ; it would kill me.”

His forehead was damp with perspiration, wrung from him by reason of his anguish (ah me ! how fatally for his peace did he love her !), and hastily he passed his kerchief over his brow and face, and again sat silent for awhile. Methought he was partly dazed by his sorrow, and scarce knew where he was or what he did. Of a sudden he turned his great, woeful eyes upon me. Mine were full of tears, and he saw the same, but said naught. Then he sat up, breathing a laboured sigh, as though the weight on his heart was heavier than he could bear, and he would he could cast it off.

“Well,” said he, “no doubt in time, if I live so long, I shall get over this maddening misery ; and perhaps also, years hence, I may even love again in a sort of fashion. The thought at present is not only abhorrent but intolerable to me. *That* will, doubtless, soften down ; but one thing at least is certain—no second experience of what I now suffer shall I

be called upon to endure. No! happily for poor weak humanity, only once in a lifetime is the heart capable of such agonizing feelings. You will hardly believe it possible, Miss Beechley, that any one come to man's estate could have been so blindly influenced by such boyish delusion; but, in truth, I never once entertained a serious thought of failure until to-day. For one thing, the very idea was so keenly painful I always warded it off—shunned it as I would the stab of a dagger. But, there! what is the use of talking? It's over now—the delusion, not the pain: that will cling to me for years—years.”

The unnaturally calm tone of his voice and the hopelessly resigned spirit of his wretchedness were more peculiarly distressing unto me than the most extreme vehemence would have been, and greatly I longed that he would now break up the conference and depart, for I had not the heart to urge him thereto myself. Presently he stood up languidly. All strength seemed to have gone out of him, and said he, sadly,—

“Thank you, Miss Beechley, for what you have done, and for that compassionate sympathy I read in your looks, and which, coming

from any one else, would be unendurable to me. Thank you for the patience with which you have listened to and—and—”

He was unable to continue. Thereupon I interposed, rising also, and quoth I, in a choking voice,—

“Do not thank me for anything, Lord Riphon; I am glad to have been of use to you in this matter, though, at the same time, grieved to even indirectly cause you so much sorrow.”

He could not bear the softest touch of condolence on his unclosed wound, and shrank away, turning him hastily to depart; but, laying my hand on his arm, I stayed him.

“My part of the compact has been faithfully performed; you will not forget *yours*. What now of the promised reward?”

“This,” he answered, with a heavy sigh. “I and my servants leave Riversdale to-day, never, in all probability, to return again. Everything, every sight and sound in and around it, has become hateful to me—hateful! hateful! Will that content you, Miss Beechley?” he added, bitterly.

“It must; but,” said I, very gently, and with a sort of sisterly tenderness partly

generated of bygone memories, "there is that would content me far, far more."

He glanced moodily at me.

"Lord Frederick, I entreat you, cast not from you in blind scorn these, my last words, humbly, earnestly spoken in the truest spirit of Christian friendship. Dismiss, yes, dismiss from your service that unholy, unprincipled French valet; and strive, oh! strive to become the servant of the great God who made you, and who, though you believe it not, is waiting with pitying patience to see if you will turn and repent, and leave blessings behind you instead of—yes, Lord Riphon, instead of curses."

He stood silent, and I held forth my hand, which he took and wrung with an unconscious vehemence that caused my fingers to tingle for long afterwards. Then he hasted him away, as though on an errand of life or death.

It is now evening, and he is gone from Riversdale, so I have heard, and, unless he brings with him a changed soul, I humbly pray that not again may his presence and that of his vassals darken this our hitherto bright and peaceful village.

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